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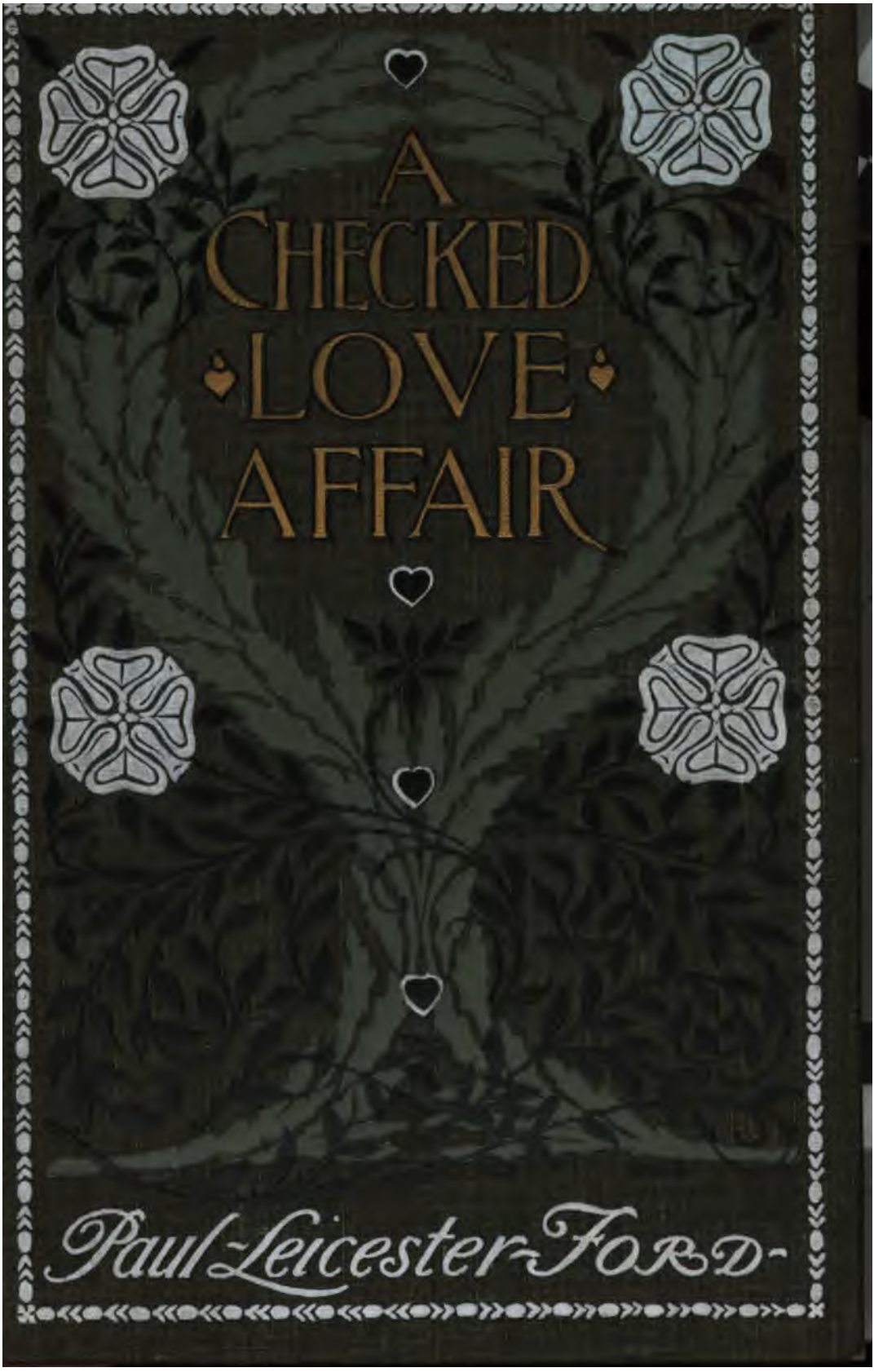
A
CHECKED
LOVE
AFFAIR
Paul Leicester Ford

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and The Cortelyou Feud
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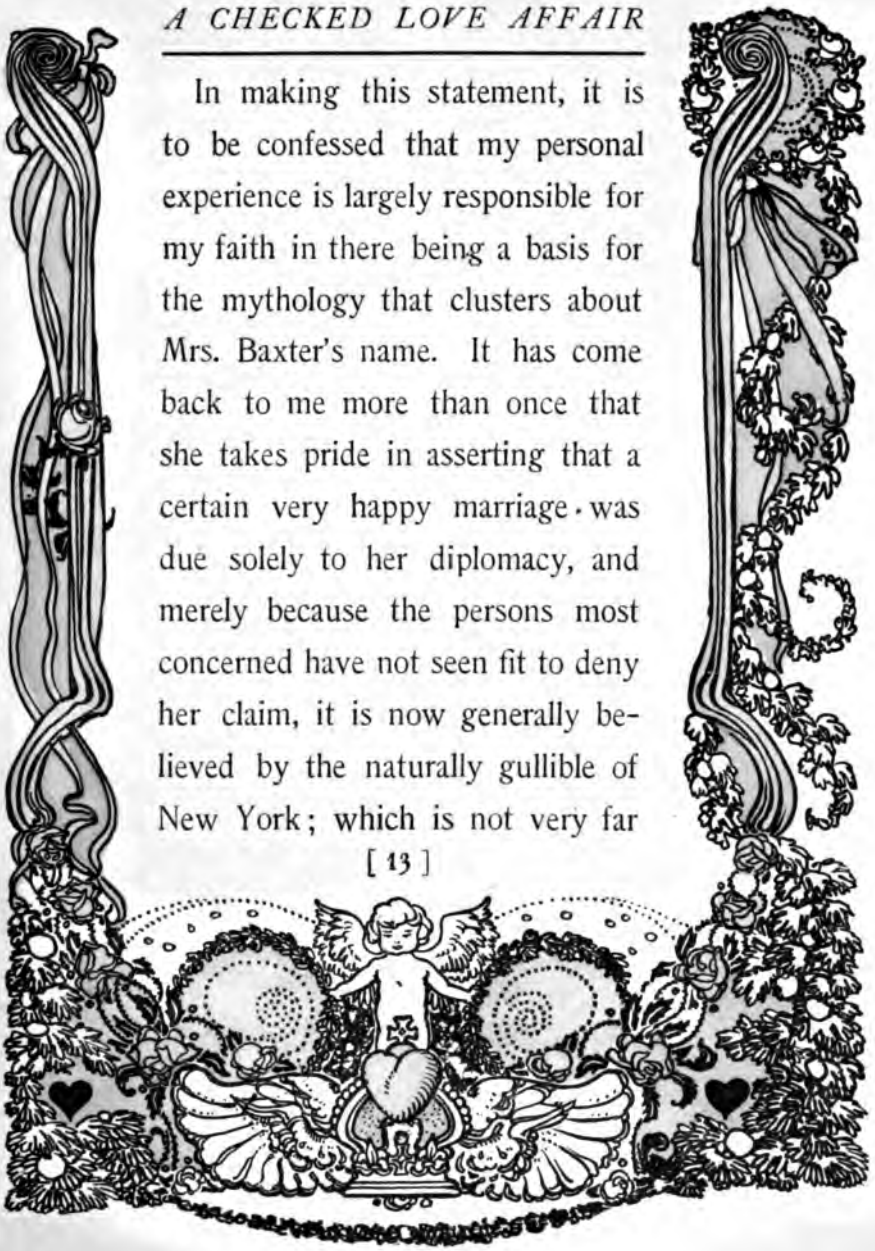
A Checked Love Affair

A CHECKED LOVE AFFAIR

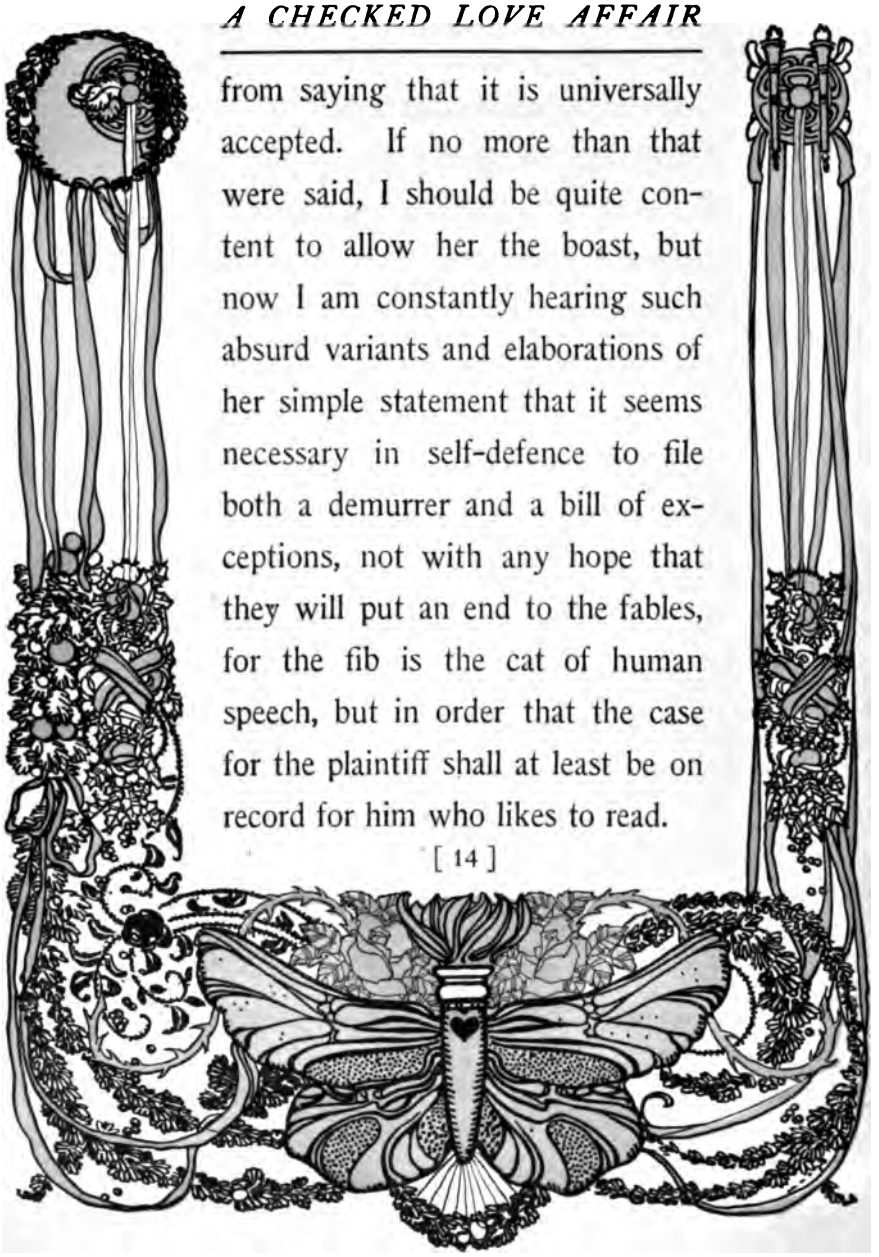
THERE are plenty of people who maintain that of the tales told of Mrs. Baxter one half are n't true, and the other half never happened. It is to be acknowledged that many of the occurrences connected by public belief or hearsay with that well-intentioned lady bear strong evidence of what may be best termed "embroidery," and more than once I have watched a mere shred of a yarn slowly evolved into a story,

which bore as slight a resemblance to its original as the chicken does to the egg, and which I should never have connected, one with the other, had I not seen the intermediate stages of growth. Yet this very metaphor tells my own view, and when, now and again, I hear some one deny the actuality of anything mothered upon her, I am always tempted to start hunting for the original, before it had been hatched into a clucking hen, or beaten into an omelette soufflé.

In making this statement, it is to be confessed that my personal experience is largely responsible for my faith in there being a basis for the mythology that clusters about Mrs. Baxter's name. It has come back to me more than once that she takes pride in asserting that a certain very happy marriage was due solely to her diplomacy, and merely because the persons most concerned have not seen fit to deny her claim, it is now generally believed by the naturally gullible of New York; which is not very far



from saying that it is universally accepted. If no more than that were said, I should be quite content to allow her the boast, but now I am constantly hearing such absurd variants and elaborations of her simple statement that it seems necessary in self-defence to file both a demurrer and a bill of exceptions, not with any hope that they will put an end to the fables, for the fib is the cat of human speech, but in order that the case for the plaintiff shall at least be on record for him who likes to read.



It may be said to have begun when, having graduated successfully from Yale, I made my start in life in a big down town bank, filled with the laudable ambitions of showing Wall Street what a valuable thing a university education is to a business man, and of becoming president of the institution within five years. At the end of that time I had forgotten all I ever learned at college, and was second assistant paying teller, with a salary of thirteen hundred a year.

That my advancement had not been quite so rapid as I hoped was in a measure due to the fact that in those years my social progress had been great, and it is to be confessed that I took far more interest in the figures of a cotillon than I did in those of a ledger. If, however, my daily toil from nine to four had not particularly attracted the attention of the president of the institution, my nightly frivolling from nine to four had served to interest the president's daughter, and one day, after business hours,

walking more on air than matter, I went to my superior's little office in the bank building, told him what I had to tell, and asked his consent, for the moment the happiest and the proudest man living, for Freda was one girl in a million, there was heaps of money, and I never doubted that now my promotion would be as rapid as hitherto it had been slow.

When I came out, I had ten pounds of lead in each boot, and a conviction that parents were but a necessary evil of nature, and a low-

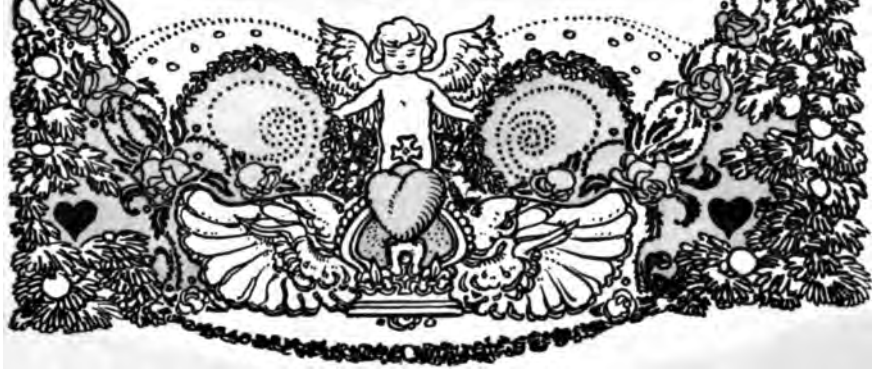
minded, sordid lot, who took particular delight in torturing their children. As a fact, Freda's papa had been very decent, for he'd told me that he should never cross his daughter's inclination in such a matter, but also that he could not consent to more than an engagement until I was in a position to properly support her; adding that he was very sorry that the cashier's reports had not been more favorable, because henceforth particular care would have to be exercised not to advance me too rapidly, lest

"For we had our billing and cooing to live on"

(See page 15)

my fellow clerks should suspect favoritism.

Well, we settled down to that slow torture, a long engagement, which ought to have been included in the Prayer Book along with the "from plague, pestilence and famine, from battle and murder, and from sudden death" in the Litany. It was n't so bad at first, for we had our billing and cooing to live on, and dinners were given in our honor, and every one made a flutter over us. But by the end of a year all that was over; we were n't in-



vited anywhere, or, if we were, Freda was rarely asked to dance, and I was never asked to lead, and no one cared to talk to either of us, so we might as well have stayed at home for all the variety or fun it meant. The old saying runs that "Marriage halves our troubles and doubles our joys," but a betrothal is quite another story, and is not the delicious *solitude a deux* of courtship and marriage, but what might be called a "solitary two in society."

It was more than human, or at least man's nature could stand, and

after some preliminary mutterings, I at last had a blow-out with Mr. Fearing, which was sufficiently foolish in all conscience' sake, but, as if that was n't bad enough, I must go straight from this interview to Freda, and begin abusing her father. Whatever she might think, she was a trump, and stood up for her paternal, telling me that I ought not to speak so of any man when I was in his house. Like a donkey I thereupon announced that that was easily remedied by my leaving. Then she said that my

love for her ought to prevent my saying such things anywhere. I retorted that what she said showed only too plainly that she cared more for her father than she did for me, and I'd always suspected it. Freda flared up, as any girl of spirit would, and before either of us realized how it came about, she was sobbing on a sofa, and I was hurrying down the front steps, with woman's faithlessness, and prussic acid, and other closely related factors flashing through my brain.

After a night's sleeplessness, I was ashamed enough, and was trying to tell Freda so in a letter, when a little package, containing the engagement ring and a note, arrived from her. The latter was the regular stereotyped form: "Best for both that such an explanation has taken place." "Need not return, but only burn my letters, as I will yours." "Trusts that what has taken place will not make a friendship impossible," and "I will ever wish for your success." Its very lack of feeling should have

told me that she had the brakes on at full tension, but I only took it as a further proof that I had become nothing to her, and so the sixth attempt at a letter went into the fire after the five previous ones.

Even then it might have been patched up, for we were both as near to breaking our hearts as those extremely india-rubbery muscles and valves can come to be, had it not been for relatives and friends. My sister, thinking I'd been very hardly treated, and wishing to carry

it off bravely, told a friend that she was really very glad of the outcome, because she had always thought that her brother was selling himself. The friend repeated this to some one, who in turn quoted it, as having been said by Mr., instead of Miss, Travis, and then it was carried back to Freda that Jim Travis had declared that he'd only cared for her money anyway, and was glad to be quit of it all. So she started off to Europe with her father, and I went back to my ledger. One very small sop to me

was that the president, just before he sailed, called me in and said he was very much pleased to have better reports of me lately, and that the engagement being now ended, he thought no one could question his promoting me to be assistant teller. But I was too miserable and sore over her going away to take this as any kindness, and hardly muttered a "Thank you."

In a year they came back from abroad, and Freda took up society again, but I'd cut all that and now

took no interest in anything but my work, so we never met; and when her father one day asked me to come in to a family dinner, I was idiot enough to refuse, with a cool satisfaction for which I ought to have been kicked. Of course Mr. Fearing was n't going to tell me, without some sign that I still cared for Freda, that she was miserable, and that perhaps he 'd been a bit hard and rough on me at the blow-out, as he meant to, before I met his advance that way; and so that chance was lost.

Here it was that Mrs. Baxter took the matter in hand. Without letting either Freda or me know that she was asking the other, she invited us both to visit her at her place up the Hudson during the same week, and what is more, she did n't bid another guest for the whole time.

It was a kill-or-cure remedy, and at first blush it seemed the former. We met at the station as we went to take the train, but each pretended not to see the other, and though I don't use tobacco, I took

to the smoker to make sure of not encountering her again. You can judge then what our respective emotions were, when, on arriving at the destination, we each saw the other step down on the platform, and of what those feelings became when Mrs. Baxter's flunkey grabbed our small impedimenta from us, led us to a trap, and then asked for our trunk checks.

If either of us had been warned, peace would probably have been made in the drive to the house, for it was a station-cart, than

which nothing but a brougham is better, as to what one says, and has the advantage not possessed by that vehicle, of letting one look straight into the eyes of the person one is with, which is likely to melt any frost which may exist, if people really love each other. But having cut each other at the station, Freda was embarrassed, and I did n't know what to do, and we both were furious at the awkwardness of the position we were placed in. Had Mrs. B. not been Mrs. B., she would have met us at the station,

and then there would have been nothing else for us to do but speak. She, however, reasoned that we only needed a meeting and a few minutes alone together to fix it all up, and arranged it all according to that notion. In consequence, we only bowed formally, and, taking opposite ends of the carriage, sat in absolute silence during the whole of the drive.

Having begun her stratagem so successfully, Mrs. Baxter carried out the whole campaign upon the same lines. At dinner that even-

ing everything she said was designed to make us talk to each other, and not to her, and while we behaved very well, any one else would have seen that practically we never even looked at each other, address our remarks as we might, and the frost in the atmosphere made the icing of the champagne quite superfluous.

The dinner eaten, with that tact which has made her famous, the hostess proceeded to "planter" us two unfortunates in the library, and then, giving the thinnest and most

palpable of excuses for departing, there she left us.

As I've already said, Freda was a girl with as much grit as beauty, and when I was only meanly wishing that I had the sand to go off to the billiard room, she took the bull by the horns.

"Mrs. Baxter is proverbial," she exclaimed, "for her poor memory and endless mistakes, and so of course she has no idea of what a trying position she has put us in. My suggestion is that we make the best of it by each taking a book

and reading until we hear her coming back, when, as we don't want to pain her, we can slip them out of sight and seem to be talking."

"That is much the best thing," I assented.

So we each sat down to a book. Freda read hers with exemplary attention, never letting her eyes leave its pages, but my book was n't particularly interesting, or else something else was more so, for I kept stealing glances over the top of it. The truth is, Freda was

" For I kept stealing glances over the top of it "

(See page 34)

lovelier even than she used to be, or at least was looking so that evening. She was charmingly gowned, and, quite unconsciously of course, she had taken a seat where the red light of a lamp and the flicker of the firelight met, setting her in a most becoming radiance. I'm afraid if my cogitations had been articulated, the variety of my swear words would have outlawed me from all society superior to the longshoremen's union, and my honestly thought opinion of myself that evening was humble enough to fit

the meanest man that crawls this earth.

At the end of an hour or so, with a preliminary and very artificial cough, which allowed us to get our books out of sight, back trotted Mrs. Baxter, fairly beaming with joy at the happy time she believed she had conferred upon us; and, after a little general talk, we separated for the night. I sat up just long enough to write a line to my sister, begging her to telegraph for my instant return to the city; and as proof that there is

such a thing as thought-telepathy, Freda wrote to her father in almost identical strains; and both of us impressed upon the servant who answered the bell the great importance of each of those letters catching the earliest mail.

This done, I went to bed, something quite different from going to sleep, as I quickly found, and after a lot of miserable tossing and fretting, I rose, relighted my light, and got out from my trunk a bundle of letters and other things — a lock of hair, the ring, a couple of dried

flowers, a ribbon or two, and that sort of truck, which means such an awful lot to a man, if it means anything; and there I sat till the Lord knows when, reading over every word Freda ever said to me on paper. I know of course that as a gentleman I ought to have done as she wrote me, and burned them, and all I can say is, I hope, if any man is ever in the same position, he 'll do what I did n't.

Freda breakfasted in her room the next morning, which simplified the meal, and I went off for

a big walk that kept me clear of the house till ten minutes before luncheon. I found the expected telegram awaiting me, and, with a properly regretful expression on my phiz, I hunted up my hostess, and, handing her the telegram as an evidence of good faith, I told her I was peremptorily called back to the city and would like to take the first possible train.

"Was there ever worse luck?" exclaimed Mrs. B. "Here Miss Fearing has been telegraphed for also, and I 've just arranged to send

her to the three-thirty-five. Must you really go?"

This pretty nearly bowled me over, but I got my breath back, and, being deep in, I stuck it through. I proposed to take an earlier train than that Freda was going on, but that hope was nipped by finding that there was n't one.

"And if you must desert me so, it could n't come better, for now you can look out for Miss Fearing," reasons Mrs. Baxter.

There was no good trying to slip out of it, and resignedly we ate

our luncheon, and then I escaped upstairs by the plea that I must pack my trunk, which I actually had packed that morning before breakfast, and this gave me such a lot to do that I did n't come down till the station wagon was waiting.

Mrs. Baxter, by some quirk of mind, went with us to the railway, which made the trip an easier one; though she would keep on protesting over her disappointment, and so compelling each of us to do an amount of regretting and that sort

of lying which is dreadful to think about. Of course, she said we must come to her later, and we were both ready enough to promise that. When we were at the station and were awaiting the train, she nearly floored both of us by saying, just after the footman came up and gave her the trunk checks, and before she handed them over to us:

"Now, really, must you go off like this? I can't help feeling that you've only made those telegrams an excuse for going. Let me have

the trunks put back on the coach, and stay on for the week?"

That knocked me out so that I dropped my ticket on the platform and had the deuce of a time to pick it up, which was a mean sneak because it left Freda to do all the stuttering and inventing. You'd better believe we were thankful when we were safely seated in the train.

It was only an hour to the city, and Freda put her small luggage and wrap on the seat by her, and read a novel the whole way, so all

I had to do was to carry her bag to the carriage and maid that met her, and then end the whole contre-temps with a lifting of my hat. I would have given every cent I had about me for a touch of the little hand, gloved though it was, and my whole year's salary, which had mounted to twenty-two hundred, for a touch of the lips that once — well, that part does n't concern Mrs. Baxter.

I went to my club and sat off by myself for the rest of the afternoon, hating humanity more than Carlyle

ever did, and hating myself still worse. Then, after making a pretence of eating some dinner, I stole off to my bachelor quarters for a good sulk. I had n't been at this very long when my trunk came, and as I wanted to look up a particular expression in one of Freda's letters, about her "love being deathless and unending," which had cheered me a bit the night before, I undid the strap, got out my key, and was about to unlock it when, to my astonishment, I found that the hasp was sprung out.

Muttering something at my carelessness in not having locked it, I lifted the top. What I saw was still further of a shock, for there was a towel, that I was sure I'd never put there, laid over the tray and neatly tucked in around the edges. Tearing it off, I found a whole exhibit of the daintiest bits of woman finery and—and—white things.

My first theory was that the express company had left the wrong trunk, and I was properly disgusted, and it was not till I looked

at the end and saw the initials "F. F." that it suddenly came to me that Mrs. Baxter — God bless her divine faculty! — had mixed the checks when she had handed them over. My next thought was a pleased one, for it was a real joy to have even a trunk of Freda's in my rooms, and I knelt down and touched my lips two or three times to what lay on the surface. Then, too, it would enable me to do Freda a small service, by sending it to her as quickly as could be; and so, tucking in the towel to the best

of my abilities, and closing the lid, I ordered a cab. While I waited for it I pondered whether good manners did not require me to write a letter of explanation to go with it, and, granting it did, whether I could n't at the same time tell her — tell her what I thought of myself and of her.

I did n't puzzle over this long, for suddenly it came to me that if I had Freda's trunk she must have mine, and I grew cold and then hot as I recalled the cir-

cumstance that I had placed that precious bundle of letters and souvenirs, which she had told me to destroy, on the very top of my packing.

Thirty minutes later I stood in the Fearings' drawing-room, feeling for all the world as if I were going to my execution. Much too soon, so far as my courage was concerned, I heard a rustling on the stairs and Freda came through the doorway.

"I've taken the liberty — I've come, Miss Fearing," I began,

"about those letters, and to ask your pardon for—"

She grew as red as I was. "Then you — you went through my trunk?" she broke in scornfully. "I'd never have believed it of you."

"What do you mean?" I demanded bewilderedly.

"How could you know I'd kept your letters if you haven't pried through my clothes and found them in my sachet case, hidden at the very bottom of my trunk?" she cried.

"Oh, Freda," I exclaimed, "do you mean that you 've kept my letters?"

"What letters do you mean?" she asked, with astonishment.

"Why, yours to me, which you must have found on the top of my trunk."

"But my key would n't open it, and then we discovered your initials, and so it was sent to you a few minutes ago."

"My darling!" was all I said, holding out my arms; and she did n't say anything, but came right into them.

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. . . . . .

And that is why Freda and I have never denied Mrs. Baxter's claim to having reconciled us; for if she didn't, I am sure I don't know who did.

The
Cortelyou
Feud

THE CORTELYOU FEUD

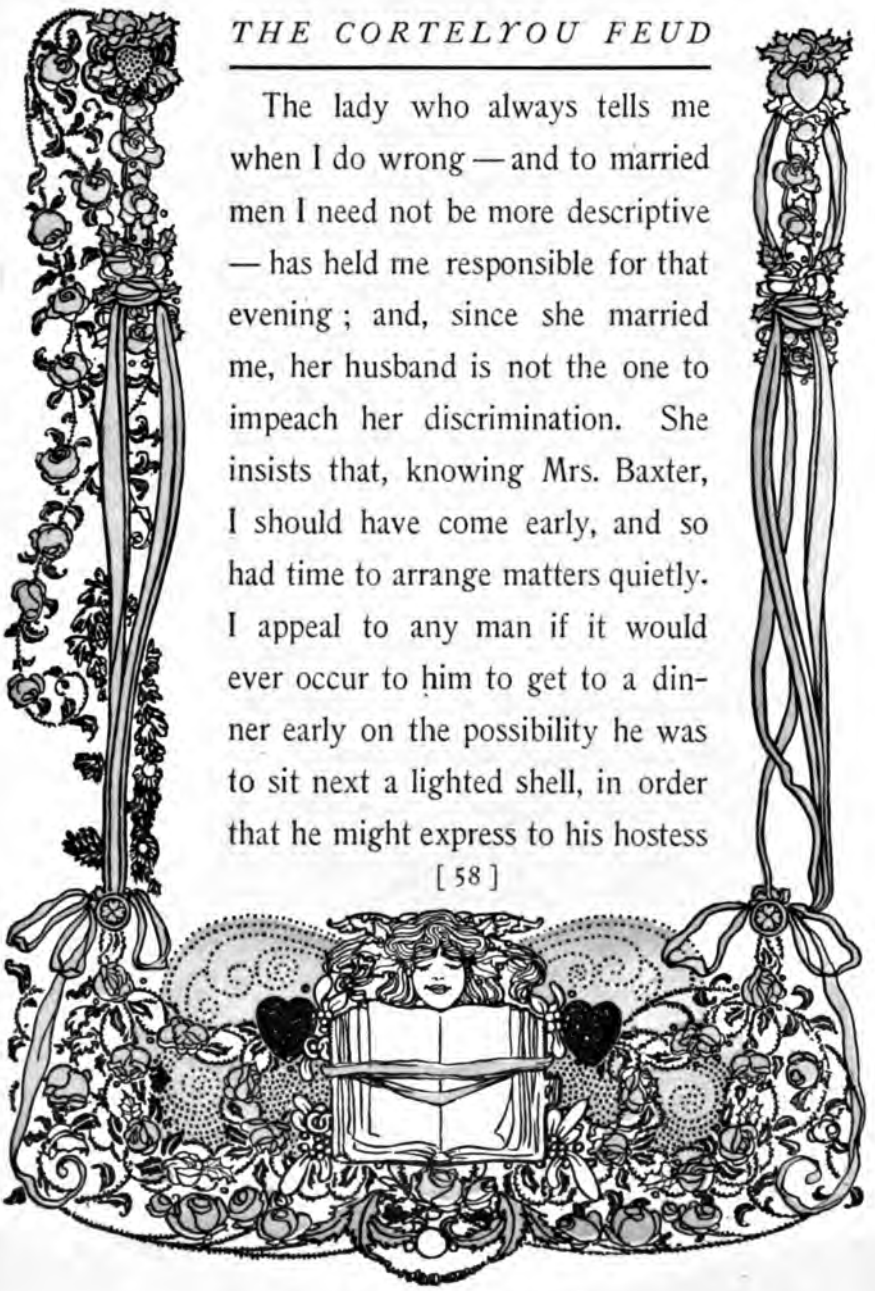
IT could never have happened to us anywhere in New York but at Mrs. Baxter's. I say this not with bitterness at, but in calm recognition of, the merits and demerits of that universally esteemed lady. Abroad, with the lords chamberlain, herald's offices, and peerages, it would be impossible. In the far West, where the biography and genealogy of the leading families are not subjects for polite conversation, it might occur frequently.

But in New York, lying between these two extremes, one is safe, except from accidents due to the unfortunate existence of a peculiar class of people.

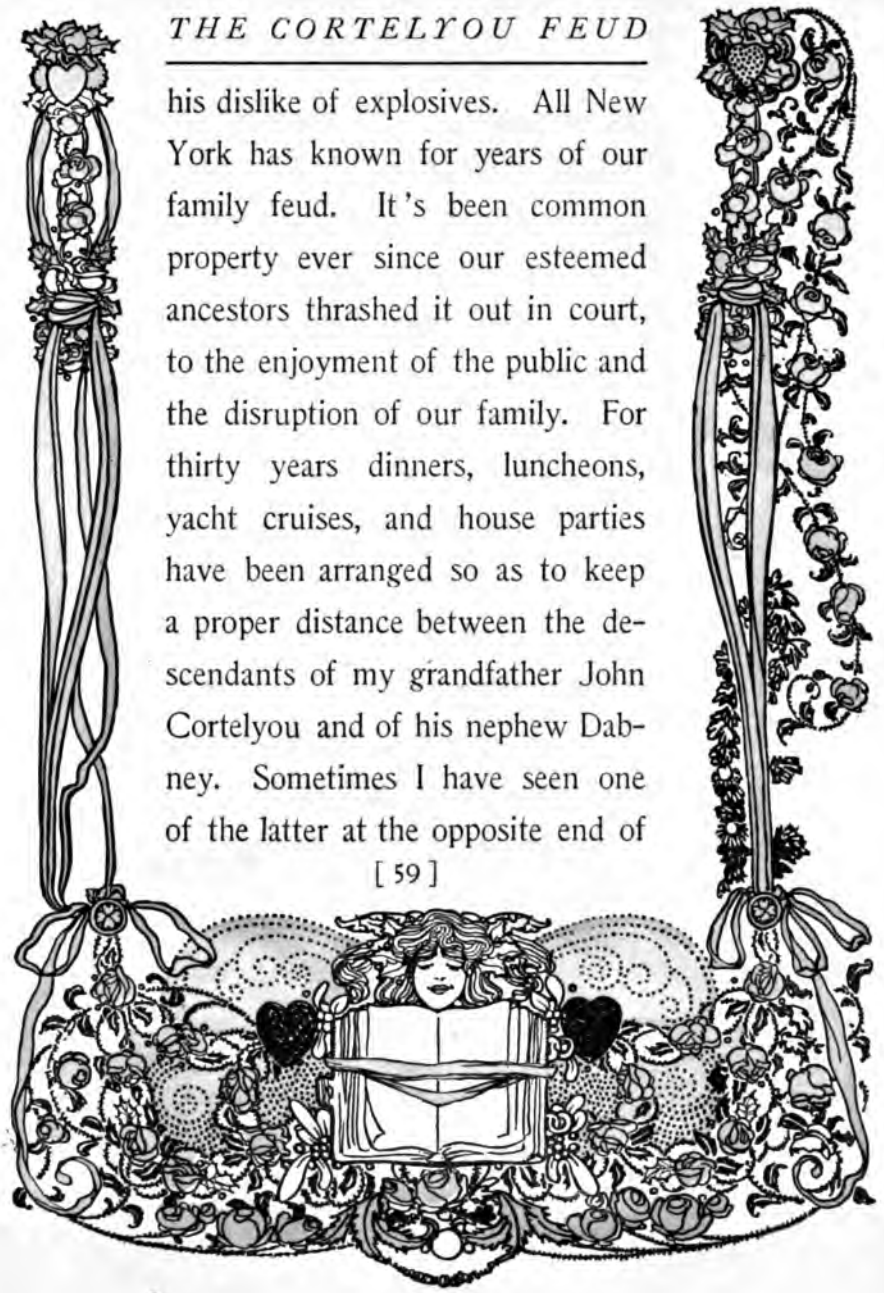
The kind I refer to are those described as having a good heart. Such an organ involves, as a natural corollary, a weak head. These qualities in combination are a terrible menace to society; for, owing to the very goodness of heart, their possessors are pardoned over and over again, and repeat their ill deeds with as much immunity from

punishment as a New York police captain. Every social circle has one or more of these half-criminals, and in that in which my lot was cast Mrs. Baxter was unequalled for the number, ingenuity, and innocence of her mistakes. Omitting all hearsay and they-say knowledge, I was her forty-seventh victim; and as pœnologists affirm that more than half of the criminal acts are undiscovered, it can at once be seen how society is menaced by people with good hearts.

The lady who always tells me when I do wrong — and to married men I need not be more descriptive — has held me responsible for that evening; and, since she married me, her husband is not the one to impeach her discrimination. She insists that, knowing Mrs. Baxter, I should have come early, and so had time to arrange matters quietly. I appeal to any man if it would ever occur to him to get to a dinner early on the possibility he was to sit next a lighted shell, in order that he might express to his hostess



his dislike of explosives. All New York has known for years of our family feud. It's been common property ever since our esteemed ancestors thrashed it out in court, to the enjoyment of the public and the disruption of our family. For thirty years dinners, luncheons, yacht cruises, and house parties have been arranged so as to keep a proper distance between the descendants of my grandfather John Cortelyou and of his nephew Dabney. Sometimes I have seen one of the latter at the opposite end of



a large dinner-table, and here and there I have had other glimpses of them. But until that evening, no matter how close chance brought us together, we had always succeeded in maintaining a dignified unconsciousness of each other's existence.

I was, let it be confessed, thirty minutes late, and merely accepting the last little envelope on the tray the footman offered me, hurried towards the drawing-room. On my way I naturally looked at the card inside and read:

Mr. Pellew.
Miss Cortelyou.

That meant nothing to me. The name is not an uncommon one, and I have taken in my aunts often enough to get accustomed to the occurrence, even in the family. So, without a second thought of the matter, I passed through the doorway and discharged my devoirs with Mrs. Baxter.

"I was on the point of suicide, thinking you had failed me," she said. "As it is, Mr. and Mrs.

Dana have just sent me word that they can't come because Milly has croup."

"My note said half after seven," I stated boldly. When one is very late it is always best to put one's hostess in the wrong, and a mistake more or less to Mrs. Baxter was immaterial.

"Oh, never!" she declared, so guiltily that I was really sorry for her. "Well, we can't discuss it now. We were just going in without you, and we'll go on, leaving you to find your partner by the

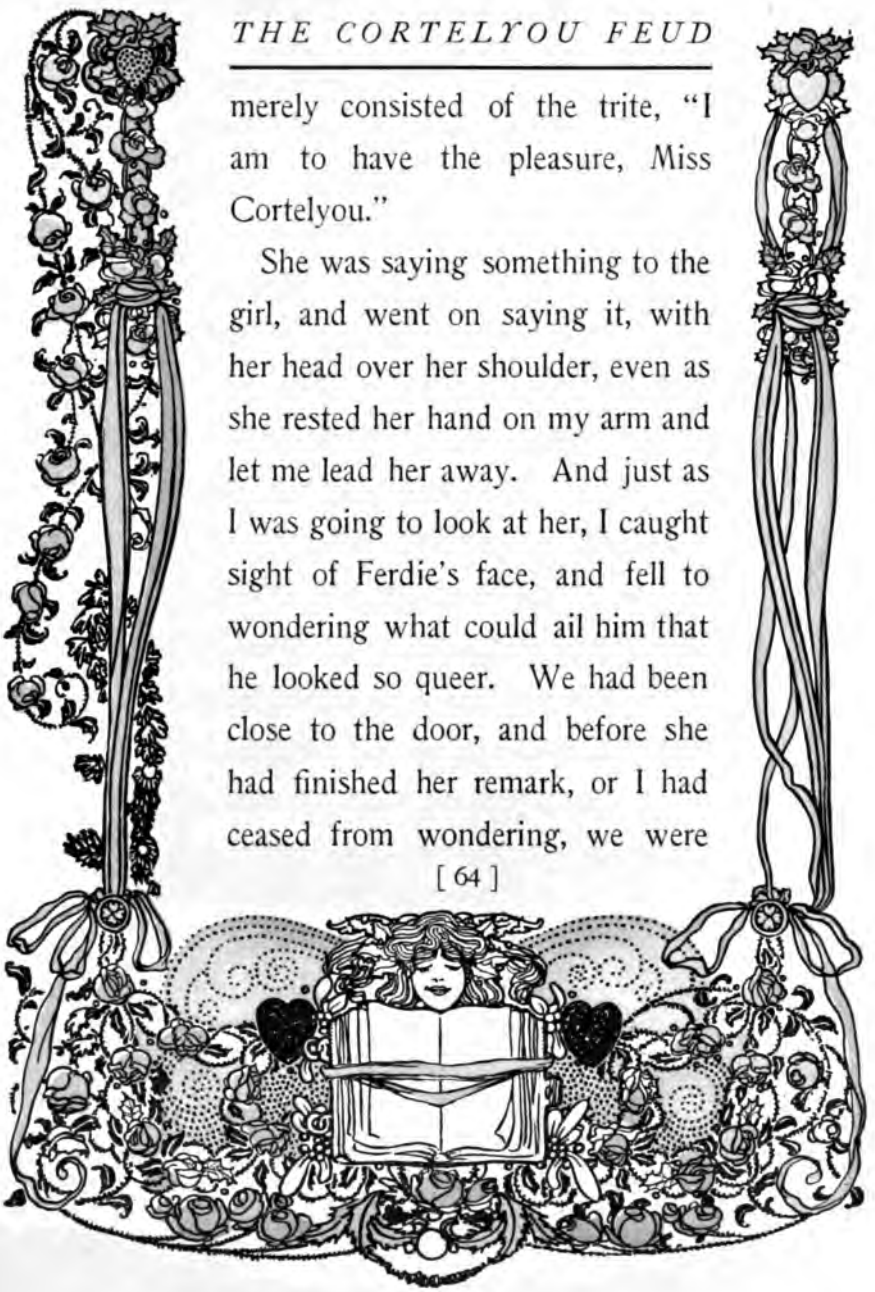
process of elimination. I haven't left you Hobson's choice, however."

I glanced round, and as the couples had gravitated together, I easily picked out the only single figure left, and went towards it. She was turned from me, standing by Ferdie Gallaudet and his partner, who had not yet moved.

"That back is too young and pretty for Aunt Ellen or Madge," was my first thought. My second was a spoken one, and

merely consisted of the trite, "I am to have the pleasure, Miss Cortelyou."

She was saying something to the girl, and went on saying it, with her head over her shoulder, even as she rested her hand on my arm and let me lead her away. And just as I was going to look at her, I caught sight of Ferdie's face, and fell to wondering what could ail him that he looked so queer. We had been close to the door, and before she had finished her remark, or I had ceased from wondering, we were



"She was saying something to the girl, and went on saying it"

(See page 64)

"She was saying something to the girl, and went on saying it"

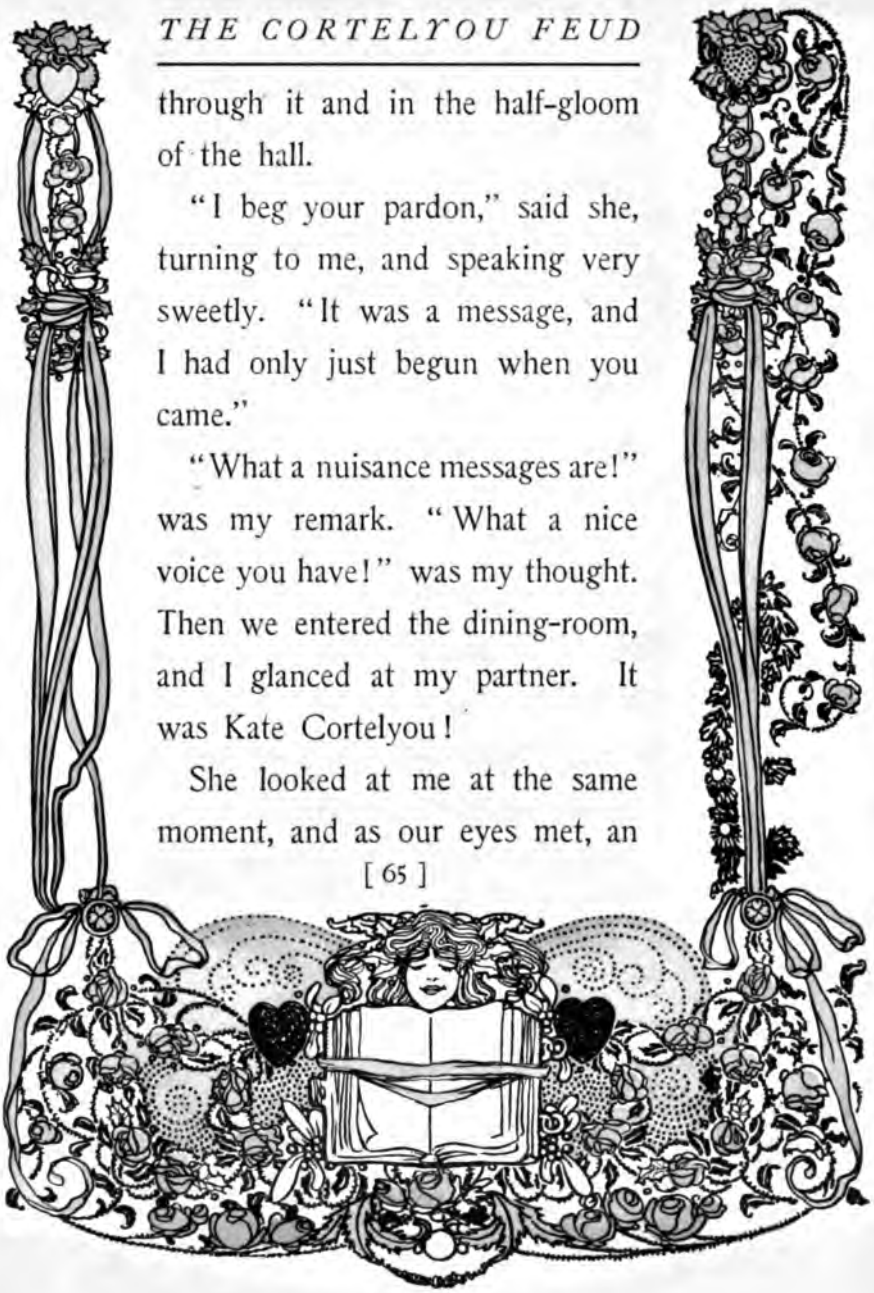
(See page 04)

through it and in the half-gloom of the hall.

"I beg your pardon," said she, turning to me, and speaking very sweetly. "It was a message, and I had only just begun when you came."

"What a nuisance messages are!" was my remark. "What a nice voice you have!" was my thought. Then we entered the dining-room, and I glanced at my partner. It was Kate Cortelyou!

She looked at me at the same moment, and as our eyes met, an



expression of consternation appeared on both our faces. At least, that's what I felt in myself and saw in her. Horror succeeded as a next sensation and expression. Womanlike, she cast her eyes appealingly towards her hostess, and, manlike, I took a step towards the hall door. In another second I think I should have bolted, but just then Ferdie Gallaudet said, "Here's your seat, Jack," with a grin like a Cheshire cat on his face. I looked at Kate and she looked at me. Then we both looked at the chairs. Me-

chanically I stepped to them and pulled out that on the right of mine. Kate's eyelashes fluttered for a moment, as if she were hesitating; then she slipped into the seat, and the next moment I was sitting beside her. But enchantingly pretty as I thought her (and I was either too fair-minded or she was too beautiful for me not to acknowledge it, however much I might dislike to do so), I could only wish I had broken my leg on my way to the house.

I turned to my left to see if any escape were possible, but my neighbor on that side was that horrible perpetual motion of a Mrs. Marvin, and, besides, she was very properly occupied with her partner. I peered furtively behind Kate to see if she could escape me, for anything was better than the alternative. Next her were two empty seats. Mrs. Baxter's capacity for social blundering had done its worst.

There is this to be said for the Cortelyou women, whether friends

or enemies: I've never seen one show the white feather in action. Just as I was preparing to collapse under this accumulation of horrors, Kate turned to me, with the friendliest of smiles, and murmured, —

"It's ghastly, but every one except Mrs. Baxter is watching us."

I took a furtive glimpse of the other guests. They were all pretending to talk, but all clearly were missing nothing of our *tableau vivant.* Was n't she clever to have seen it so quickly?

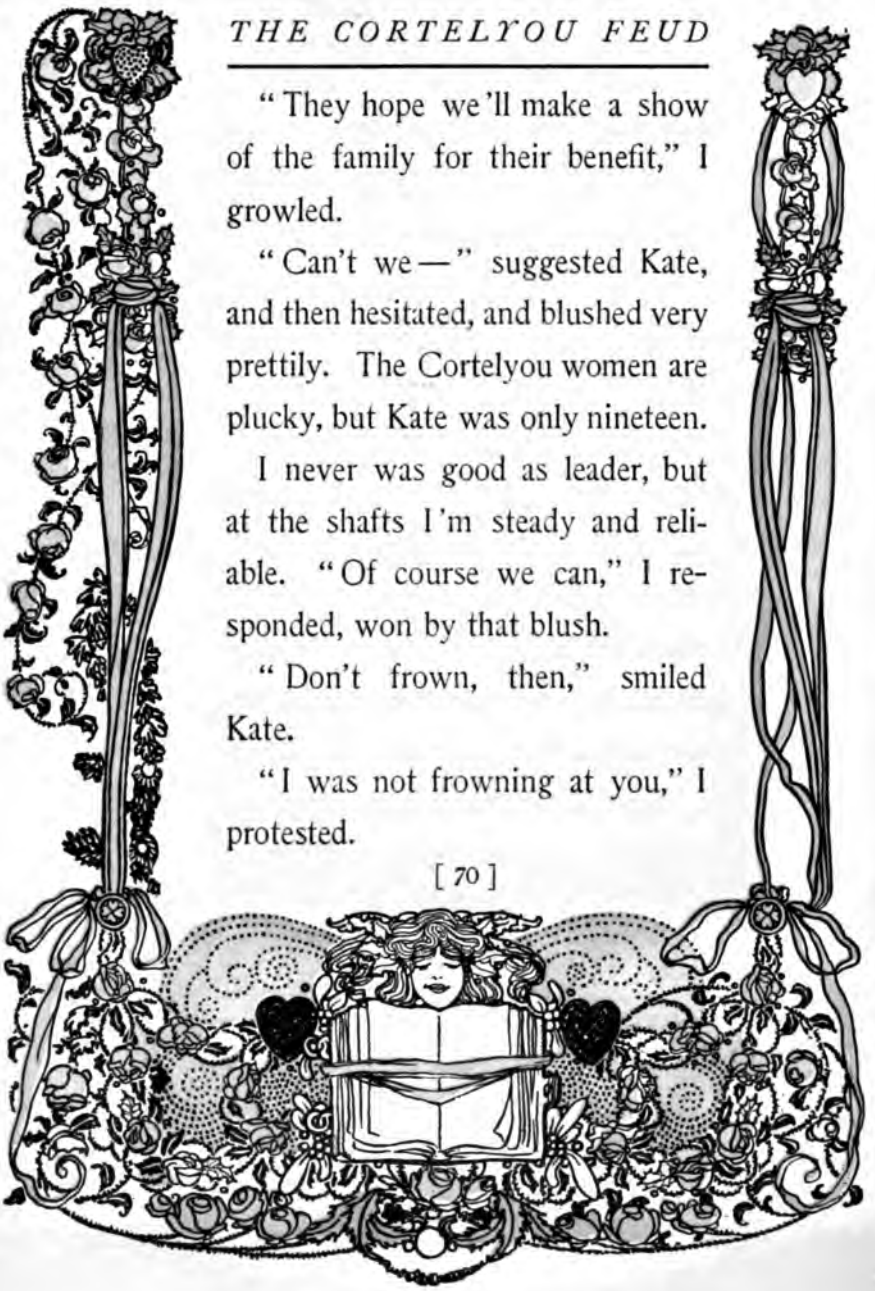
"They hope we'll make a show of the family for their benefit," I growled.

"Can't we—" suggested Kate, and then hesitated, and blushed very prettily. The Cortelyou women are plucky, but Kate was only nineteen.

I never was good as leader, but at the shafts I'm steady and reliable. "Of course we can," I responded, won by that blush.

"Don't frown, then," smiled Kate.

"I was not frowning at you," I protested.



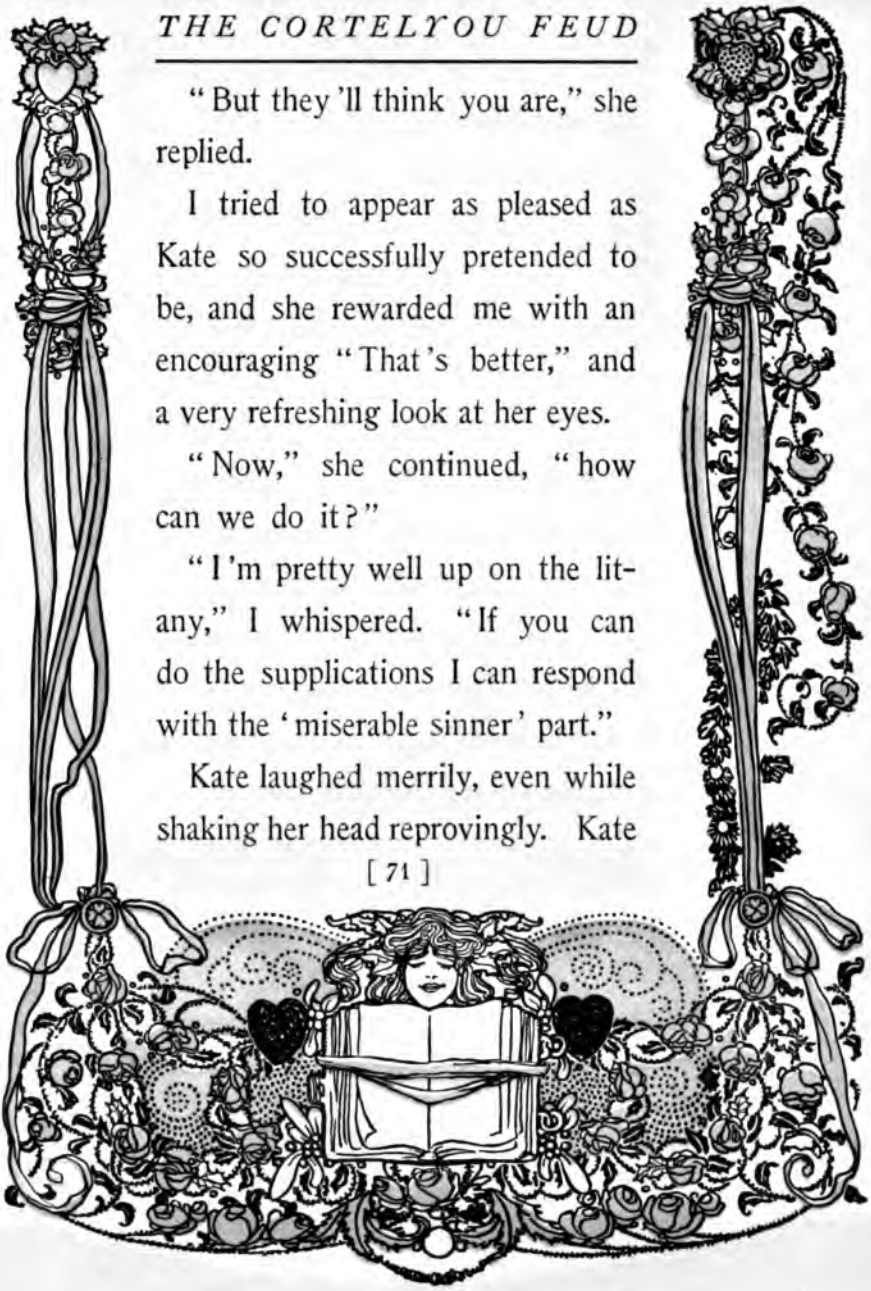
"But they 'll think you are," she replied.

I tried to appear as pleased as Kate so successfully pretended to be, and she rewarded me with an encouraging "That 's better," and a very refreshing look at her eyes.

"Now," she continued, "how can we do it?"

"I 'm pretty well up on the litany," I whispered. "If you can do the supplications I can respond with the 'miserable sinner' part."

Kate laughed merrily, even while shaking her head reprovingly. Kate



has nice teeth. "You are painfully frank," she told me.

"Frank?"

"Yes. You are probably not a bit more miserable than I am, but I don't groan aloud."

"Oh, I say!" I exclaimed, rather horrified at the construction my speech had been given. "It would be pure form, you know, quite as it is in church, and not mean a bit more than it does when the sinner's pretty and wears a French gown."

Kate drew her mouth down into a church-going expression, which

was very fetching in its demureness, but which wasn't suitable for our public performance, so I remarked:

"Don't look so disapproving. The saintly vein suits the Madonna type, but the Cortelyou forte lies in quite another direction."

I won another laugh from those unsaintly lips. "You are worse than I thought," she added.

"Then you have thought of me?" I inquired, beginning to mellow under her laugh. That was a mistake, for her face in-

stantly became serious, and her eyes gave a flash.

"What I think is my own concern," she responded. The Cortelyou women are stunning when they look haughty.

Being one of the family, however, I am too accustomed to the look to be as entirely crushed by it as others are. "Who's frowning now?" I asked. I thought I'd learn what kind of a temper Kate had.

She still smiled as if she liked being put next me, but her eyes gleamed, and I knew she'd pay me

for my speech if the opportunity occurred.

"We can't begin like this," she said. "Suggest something else."

"I once heard of a poor couple in an English county who were always sitting next each other, so they agreed to count alternative tens up to a thousand," I answered.

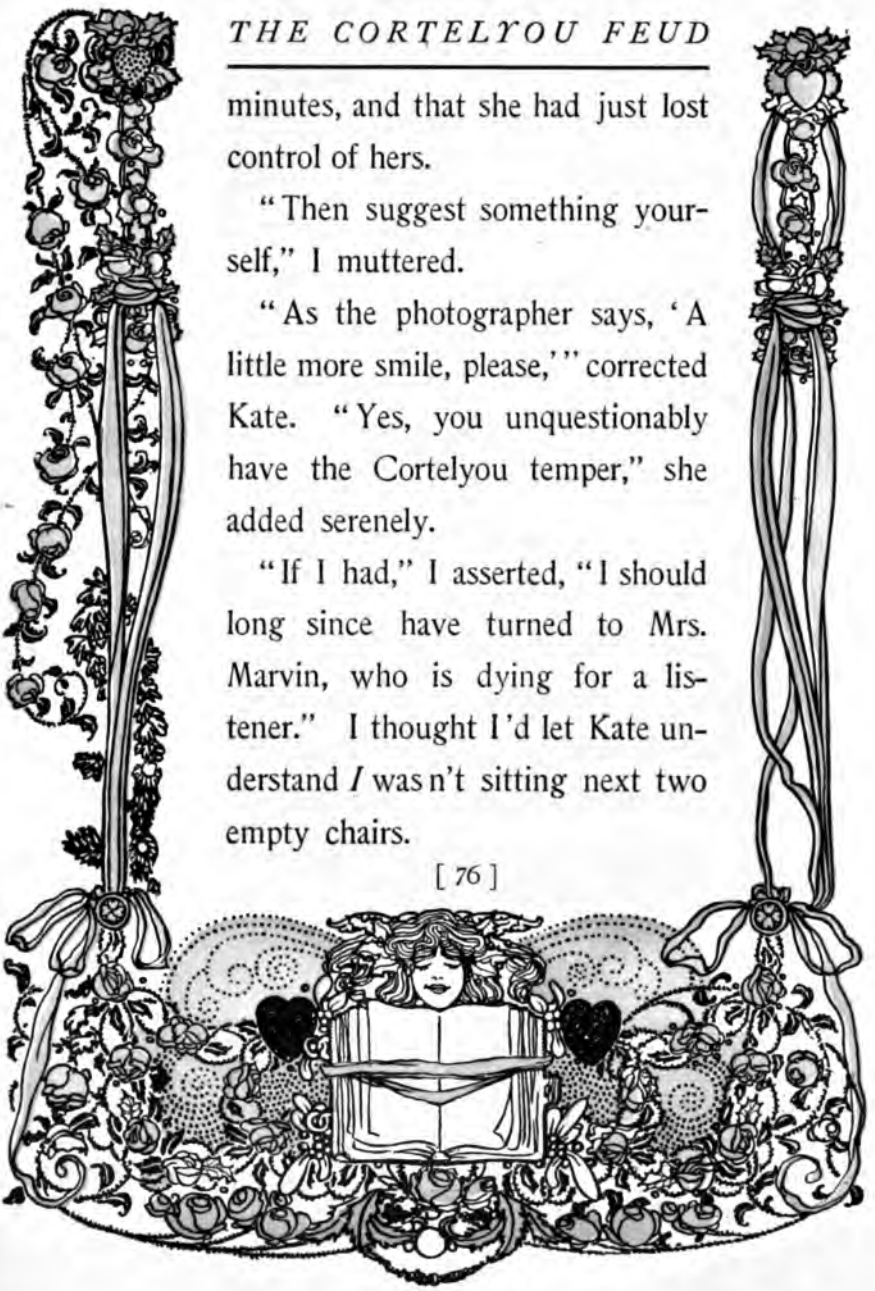
"I'm afraid you have n't enough facial control for that," replied Kate, sweetly, appearing the picture of contentment. I thought her remark unnecessary, considering we had been face to face only a few

minutes, and that she had just lost control of hers.

"Then suggest something yourself," I muttered.

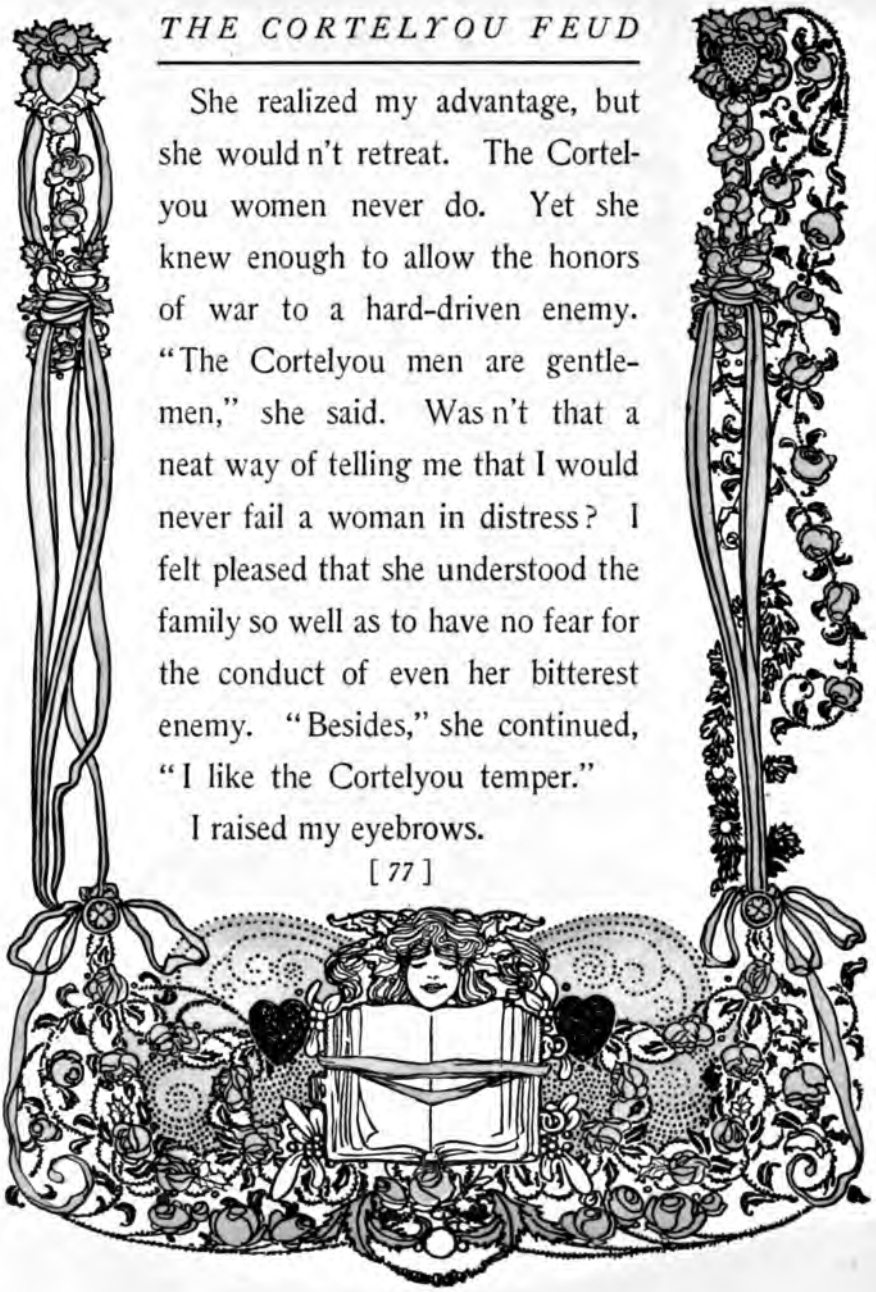
"As the photographer says, 'A little more smile, please,'" corrected Kate. "Yes, you unquestionably have the Cortelyou temper," she added serenely.

"If I had," I asserted, "I should long since have turned to Mrs. Marvin, who is dying for a listener." I thought I'd let Kate understand *I* was n't sitting next two empty chairs.



She realized my advantage, but she would n't retreat. The Cortelyou women never do. Yet she knew enough to allow the honors of war to a hard-driven enemy. "The Cortelyou men are gentlemen," she said. Was n't that a neat way of telling me that I would never fail a woman in distress? I felt pleased that she understood the family so well as to have no fear for the conduct of even her bitterest enemy. "Besides," she continued, "I like the Cortelyou temper."

I raised my eyebrows.



"Yes," she persisted, "it's an absolutely reliable factor. Now, papa—" Then she hesitated, realizing the slip.

With an older girl I should have let her flounder, and enjoyed it; but she was so young, and blushed so charmingly that I had to help her out. "Don't keep me in suspense about your father," I said, in my most interested of tones, as if I truly wished to know something of that blot on the 'scutcheon. This was my second mistake, and a bad one.

"We'll leave Mr. Dabney Cor-

telyou out of the conversation, please," she retorted, looking me in the eyes. Was there ever a meaner return for an act of pure charity than that?

By the way, Kate's eyes are not Cortelyou. I wondered from where she got them. When we are angry we contract ours, which is ugly. She opens hers, which is — I tried to make her do it again by saying, "You should set a better example, then." No good: she had got back to her form, and was smiling sweetly.

"They are furiously disappointed so far," she remarked.

"What an old curiosity shop the world is about other people's affairs! It's no concern of theirs that my grandfather and your"— I faltered, and went on—"that my grandfather had a row in his family. We don't talk of it." When I said "we" I meant the present company, but unfortunately Kate took it to mean our faction, and knowing of her father's idle blabbing, she did n't like it.

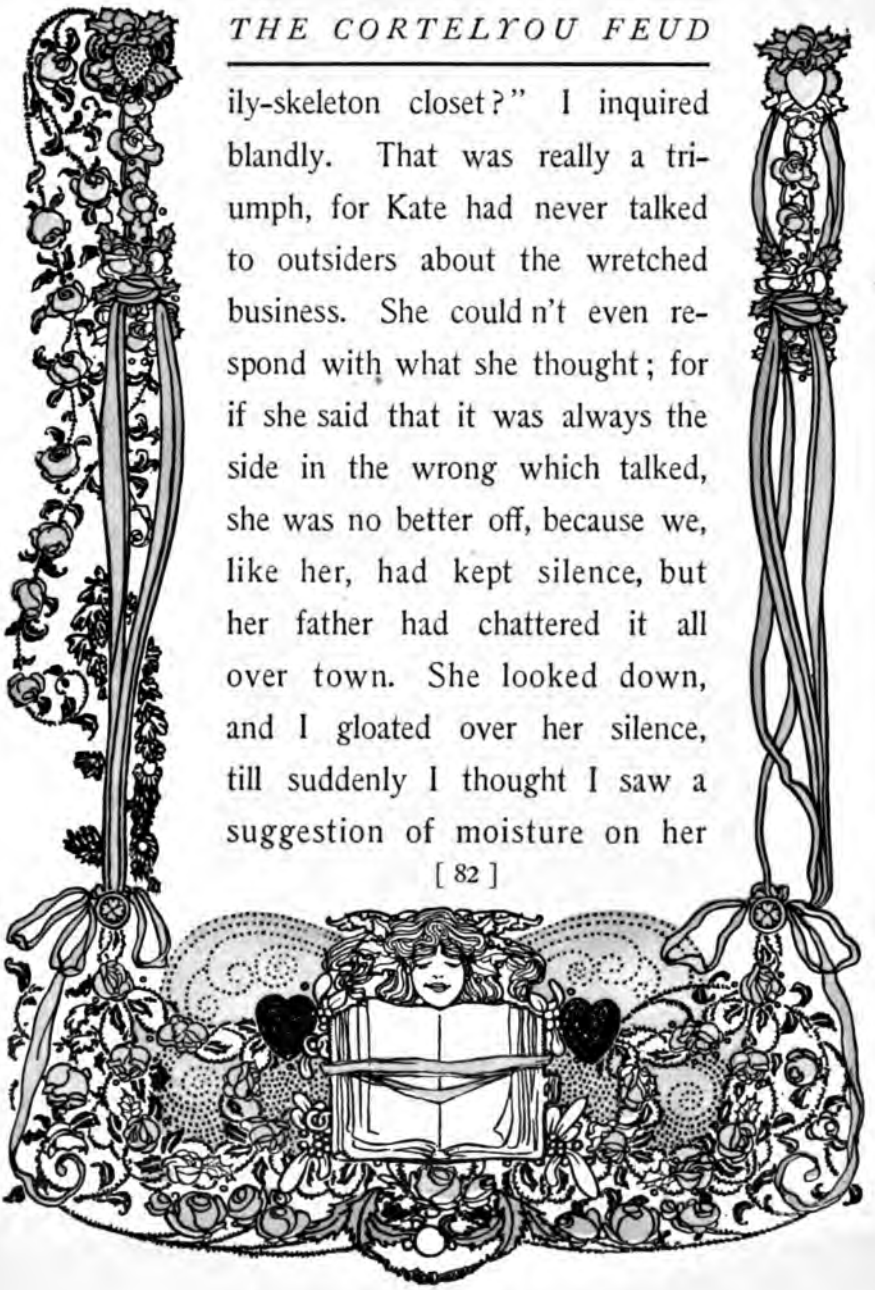
"Your side has always dodged publicity," she affirmed viciously, though smiling winsomely. Kate's smile must be her strong card.

"We have maintained a dignified silence," I responded calmly; but I knew that a dagger thrust below that beautifully modelled throat would be less cruel.

She tried to carry the wound bravely. "My father is quite justified in letting the truth be known," she insisted.

"Then why don't you, too, give public house-warmings in the fam-

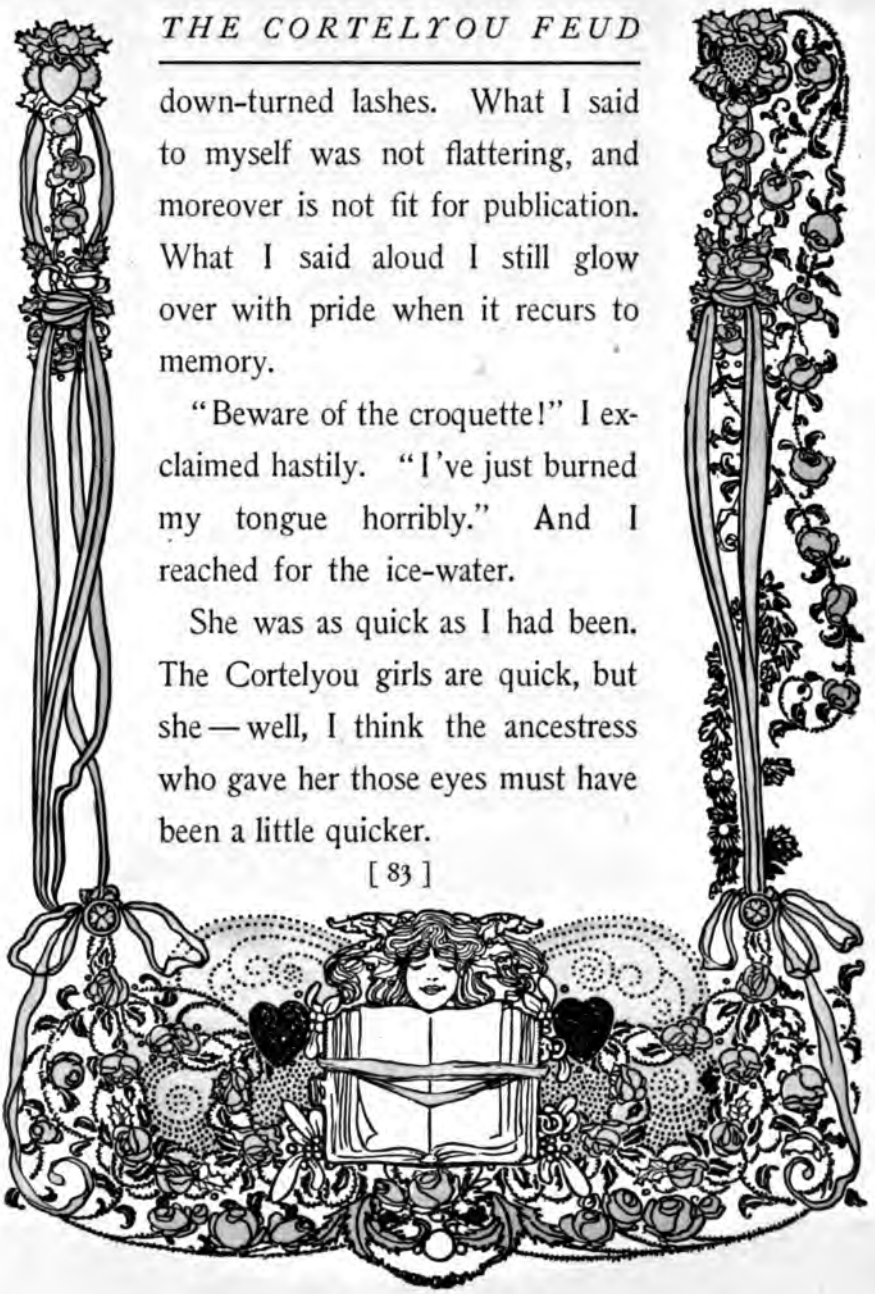
ily-skeleton closet?" I inquired blandly. That was really a triumph, for Kate had never talked to outsiders about the wretched business. She could n't even respond with what she thought; for if she said that it was always the side in the wrong which talked, she was no better off, because we, like her, had kept silence, but her father had chattered it all over town. She looked down, and I gloated over her silence, till suddenly I thought I saw a suggestion of moisture on her



down-turned lashes. What I said to myself was not flattering, and moreover is not fit for publication. What I said aloud I still glow over with pride when it recurs to memory.

"Beware of the croquette!" I exclaimed hastily. "I've just burned my tongue horribly." And I reached for the ice-water.

She was as quick as I had been. The Cortelyou girls are quick, but she — well, I think the ancestress who gave her those eyes must have been a little quicker.



"You spoke a moment too late," she replied, looking up at me. "I had just done the same, and feel like weeping." I wonder what the recording angel wrote against those two speeches?

Then suddenly Kate began to laugh.

"What is it?" I queried.

"Taste your croquette," she suggested.

It was as cool as it should have been hot!

We both laughed so heartily that Mr. Baxter called, "Come; don't

keep such a good story to yourselves."

"Pretend you are so engrossed that you didn't hear," advised Kate, simulating the utmost interest. "Aren't we doing well?"

"Thanks to you," was my gallant reply.

"Thanks to the Cortelyous," she declared.

"They might have known," said I, "that we'd never have a public circus to please them."

"Isn't it nice," she responded, "since we had to have a fracas,

that it should be between ladies and gentlemen?"

"Isn't it?" I acceded. "Just supposing there had been some cad concerned, who would have written to the papers and talked to reporters!"

"That was impossible, because we are all Cortelyous," explained Kate. I like a girl who stands up for her stock.

"Yes," I assented. "And that's the one advantage of family rows."

"I want to tell you," she went on, "that you do my father a

great injustice. Some natures are silent in grief or pain, and some must cry out. Because he talks, merely means that he suffers."

I longed to quote her remark about leaving her father out of the conversation, but having told her there were no cads in the family, the quotation was unavailable. So I merely observed, "Not knowing Mr. Dabney Cortelyou, I have had no chance to do him justice."

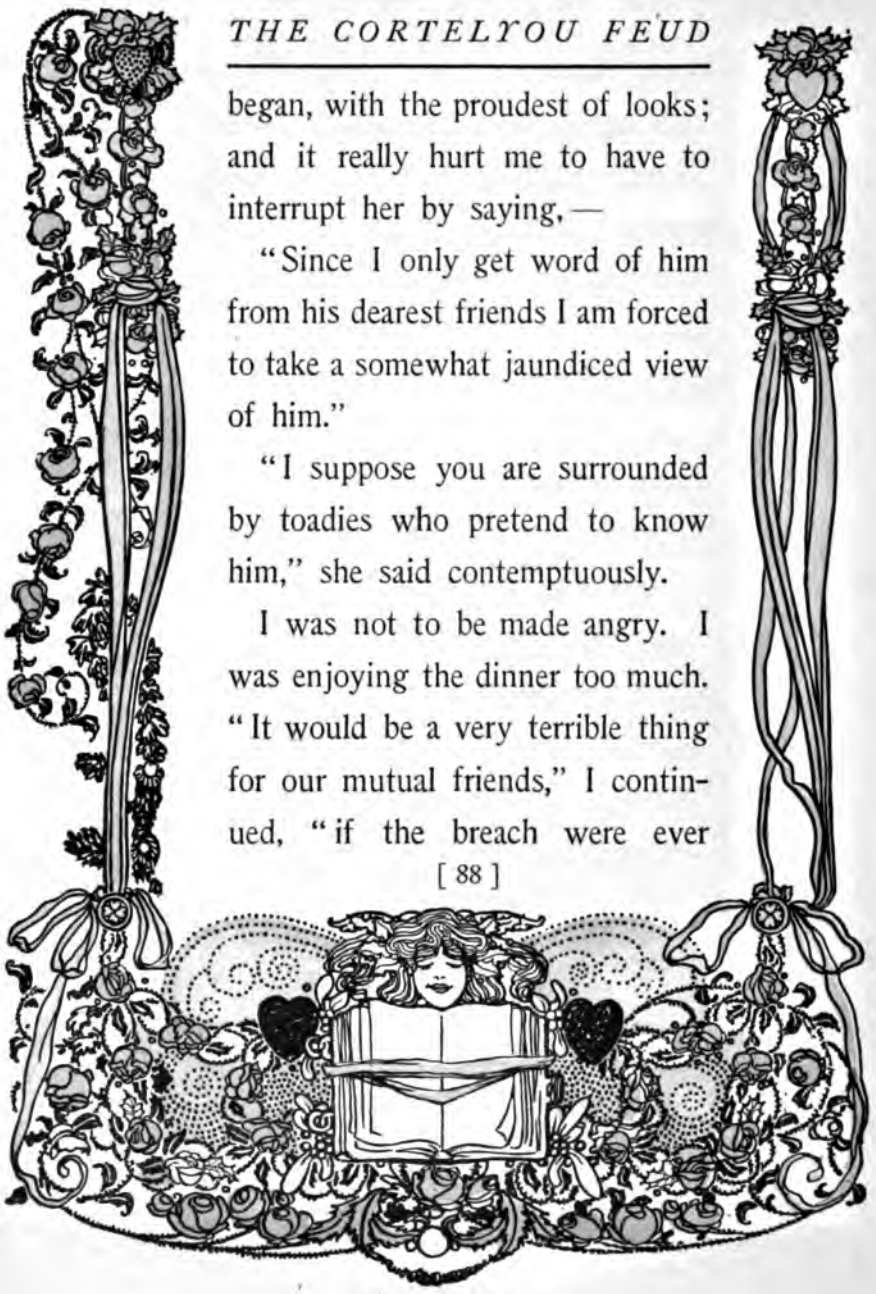
"But what you hear—" she

began, with the proudest of looks; and it really hurt me to have to interrupt her by saying, —

"Since I only get word of him from his dearest friends I am forced to take a somewhat jaundiced view of him."

"I suppose you are surrounded by toadies who pretend to know him," she said contemptuously.

I was not to be made angry. I was enjoying the dinner too much. "It would be a very terrible thing for our mutual friends," I continued, "if the breach were ever

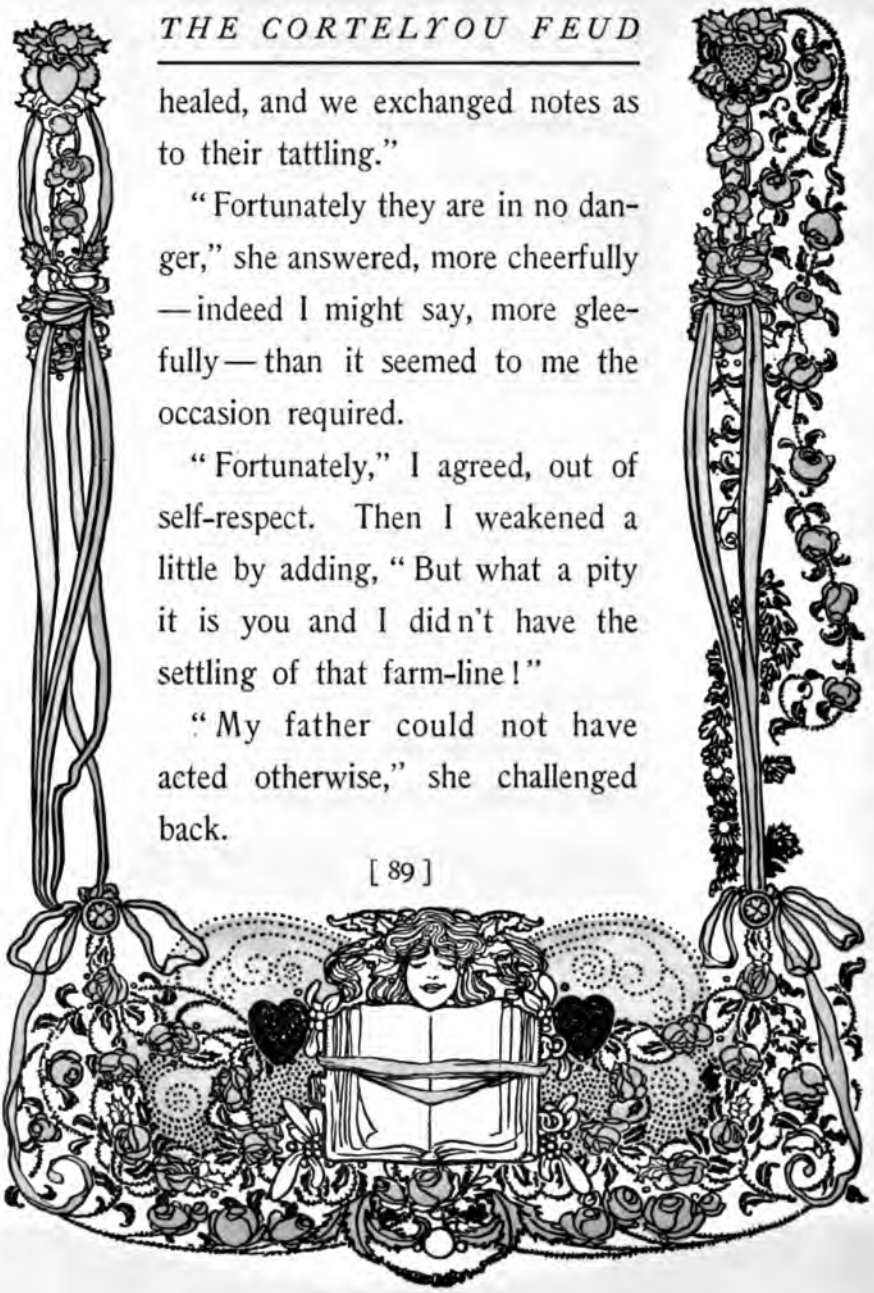


healed, and we exchanged notes as to their tattling."

"Fortunately they are in no danger," she answered, more cheerfully — indeed I might say, more gleefully — than it seemed to me the occasion required.

"Fortunately," I agreed, out of self-respect. Then I weakened a little by adding, "But what a pity it is you and I didn't have the settling of that farm-line!"

"My father could not have acted otherwise," she challenged back.



"And the courts decided that my grandfather was right."

"I should have done just as he did," she replied.

"Then you acknowledge my grandfather was right?"

"I!" — indignantly.

"You just assured me you should have done as he did!" I teased, laughing. "No. Of course both of them were justified in everything but in their making a legal matter a family quarrel. If we had had it to do, it would have been done amicably, I think."

"'What makes you so sure?'"

(See page 91)

"What makes you so sure?" she asked.

"Because I am sweet-tempered, and you—"

She would n't accept a compliment from an enemy, so interrupted me with, "My father has one of the finest natures I have ever known."

"'Physician, know thyself,'" I quoted, getting in the compliment in spite of her.

"That 's more than you do," she replied merrily.

This could be taken in two ways, but I preferred to make it applica-

ble to her rather than to myself. I said, "Our acquaintance has been short."

"But we know all about the stock," she corrected.

"I 'm proud of the family," I acknowledged; "but don't let 's be Ibsenish."

"I knew you did n't like him," said Kate, confidentially. "I don't either."

"He 's rather rough on us old families," I intimated.

"Sour grapes," explained Kate. "The would n't-because-I-can't-be

people always stir up the sediments of my Cortelyou temper."

"I thought you liked the family temper," I suggested.

"In anybody but myself," she told me. "With others it's really a great help. Now, with my brothers, I know just how far I can go safely, and it's easy to manage them."

"I suppose that accounts for the ease with which you manage me."

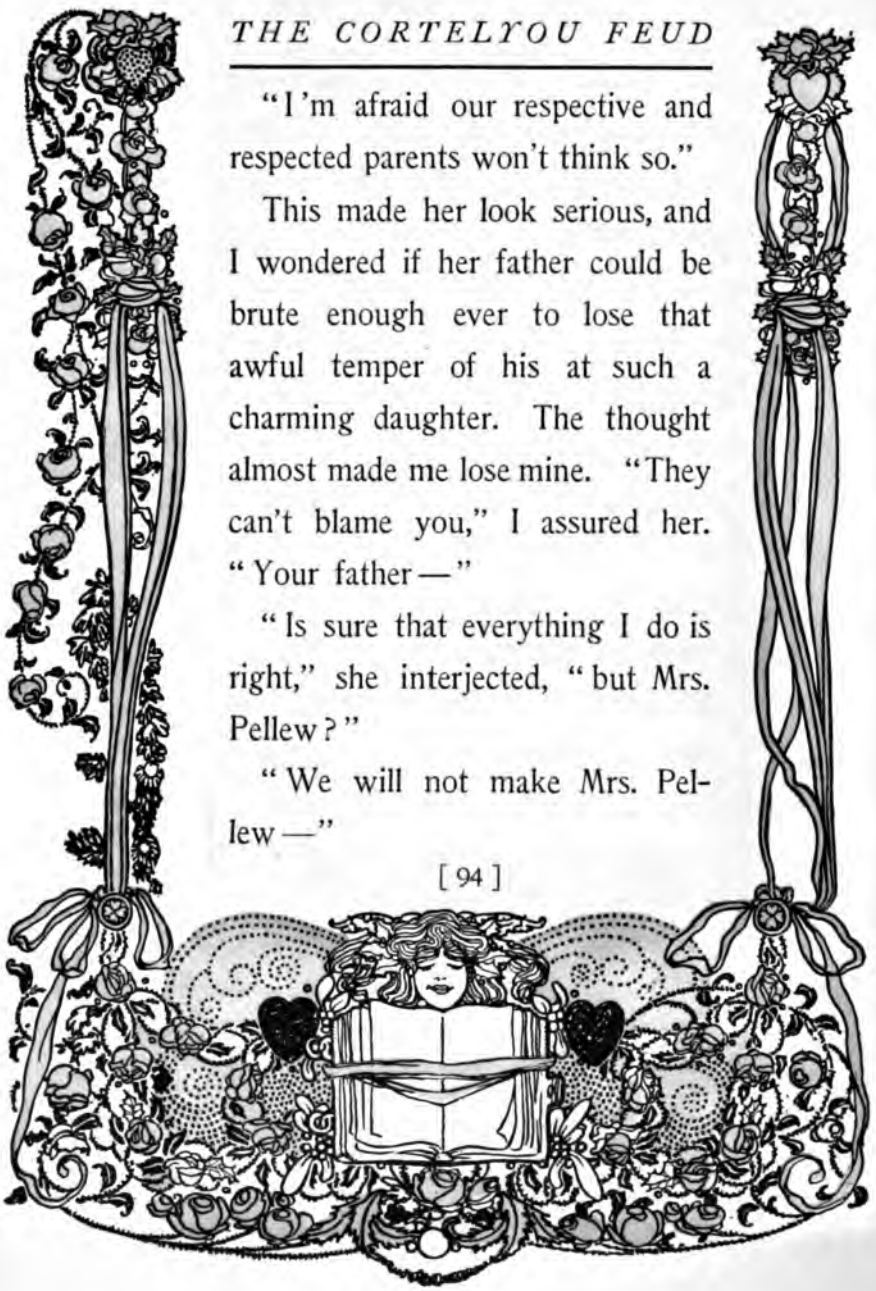
She laughed, and replied demurely, "I think we are both on our good behavior."

"I'm afraid our respective and respected parents won't think so."

This made her look serious, and I wondered if her father could be brute enough ever to lose that awful temper of his at such a charming daughter. The thought almost made me lose mine. "They can't blame you," I assured her. "Your father—"

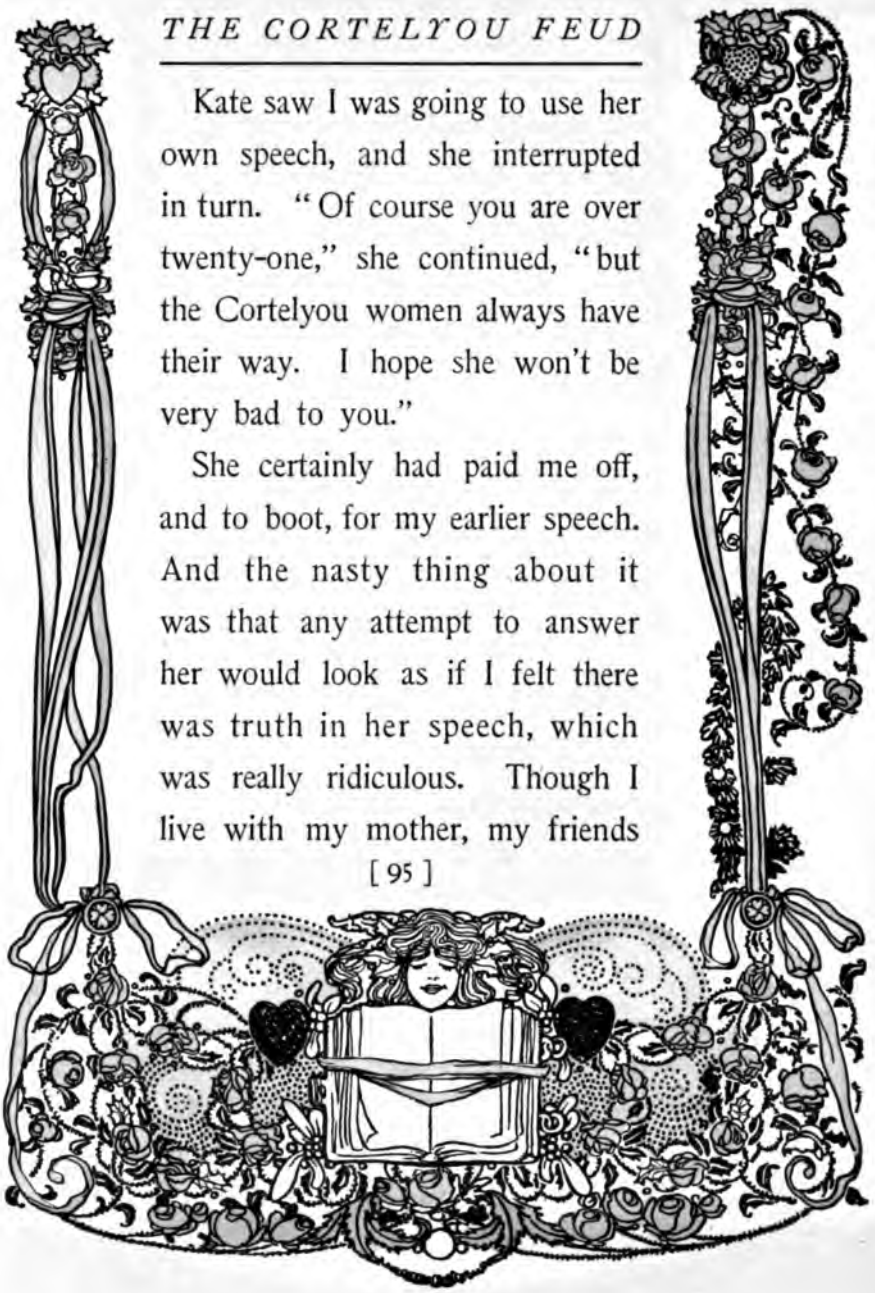
"Is sure that everything I do is right," she interjected, "but Mrs. Pellew?"

"We will not make Mrs. Pellew—"



Kate saw I was going to use her own speech, and she interrupted in turn. "Of course you are over twenty-one," she continued, "but the Cortelyou women always have their way. I hope she won't be very bad to you."

She certainly had paid me off, and to boot, for my earlier speech. And the nasty thing about it was that any attempt to answer her would look as if I felt there was truth in her speech, which was really ridiculous. Though I live with my mother, my friends



know who is the real master of the house.

"Any one living with a Cortelyou woman must confess her superiority," I responded, bowing deferentially.

"Yes," she said, nodding her head knowingly. "People say that she spoils you. Now I see how you compass it."

"We have only exchanged Ibsen for Mrs. Grundy," I complained.

"'Excelsior' is a good rule," announced Kate.

"That's what you'll be doing

in a moment," said I, trying to look doleful, for we were eating the game course.

"How well you act it!" replied Kate. "You ought to go on the stage. What a pity that you should waste your time on clubs and afternoon teas!"

"Look here," I protested, "I've done my best all through dinner, considering my Cortelyou temper, and now, just because it's so nearly over that you don't need me any longer is no reason for making such speeches.

I don't go to my club once a week, and I despise afternoon teas."

"That sampler has become positively threadbare," retorted Kate. "I really think it must be worked in worsted, and hung up in all the New York clubs, like 'God bless our home!' and 'Merry Christmas!'"

"I much prefer hearts to clubs, for a steady trump," I remarked.

"You play billiards, I presume?"

"Yes," I innocently replied.

"What 's your average run?"

It was a tempting bait she shoved under my nose, but I realized the trap, and was too wary to be caught. "Oh, four, when I 'm in good form."

"Really?"

"Really." I did not choose to add that I was talking of the balk-line game, not caring to be too technical with a woman.

"That 's very curious!" she exclaimed.

"I suppose some devoted friend of mine has told you I 'm only a billiard-marker?" I inquired.

"No — but — "

"But?"

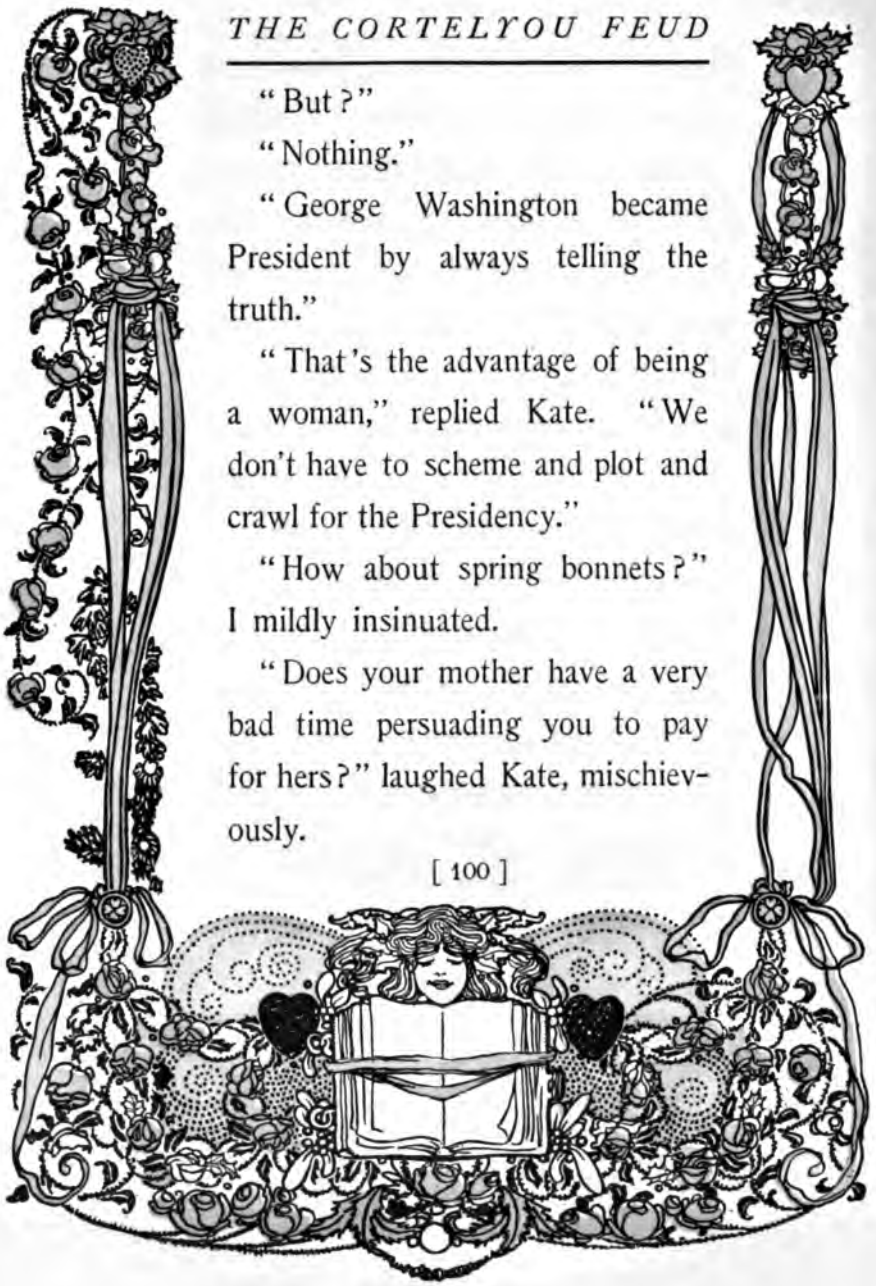
"Nothing."

"George Washington became President by always telling the truth."

"That's the advantage of being a woman," replied Kate. "We don't have to scheme and plot and crawl for the Presidency."

"How about spring bonnets?" I mildly insinuated.

"Does your mother have a very bad time persuading you to pay for hers?" laughed Kate, mischievously.



I didn't like the question, though I knew she was only teasing, so I recurred to my question. "You haven't told me what that 'nothing' was," I persisted.

"I oughtn't," urged Kate.

"Then I know you will," I said confidently.

"Well, Seymour Halsey said to Weedon the other night, 'I wish you could play with Jack Pellew, so as to knock some of his airs out of him!'"

"Why," I ejaculated, "I could play cushion caroms against your

brother's straight game and beat him then!"

"I never did believe that story about George Washington," asserted Kate, with a singular want of relevance.

"No woman could," I answered, squaring accounts promptly.

Here I saw the little preliminary flutter among the ladies, and knowing that I should never speak to Kate again, I said: "Miss Cortelyou, I'm afraid an unkind remark of mine a little while ago gave you pain. You've probably forgotten

it already, but I never shall cease to regret I made it."

"Don't think of it again," she replied, kindly, as she rose. "And thank you for a pleasant evening."

"Don't blame me for that," I pleaded hastily. "It was your own fault."

"Not entirely," denied Kate. "We did it so well that I'm prouder than ever of the family."

"I decline to share this honor with my grandfather," I protested indignantly. "He couldn't keep his temper, bother him!"

We were at the door now, and Kate gave me the prettiest of parting nods and smiles.

"Was n't it a pity?" she sighed. That was distinctly nice of her. Just like a Cortelyou woman.

"Whew! Jack," whistled Ferdie Gallaudet. "I thought I should die, and expected to sit on your body at the post-mortem." Ferdie thinks he 's clever!

"Oh, shut up, Ferdie," I growled, dropping back into my seat.

"Don't wonder your temper 's queered," persisted the little

ass. "'Wotinell' did you talk about?"

"Family matters," I muttered.

"Oh, I say, that's a bit shiny at the joints. It was too well done to have verged on that subject."

"We talked family matters, and enjoyed it," I insisted.

"Ever hear of George Washington?" inquired Ferdie.

"Kate mentioned him to me tonight, and I promised to put him up at the Knickerbocker for a month."

"Kate!" exclaimed Ferdie.

I lighted my cigar.

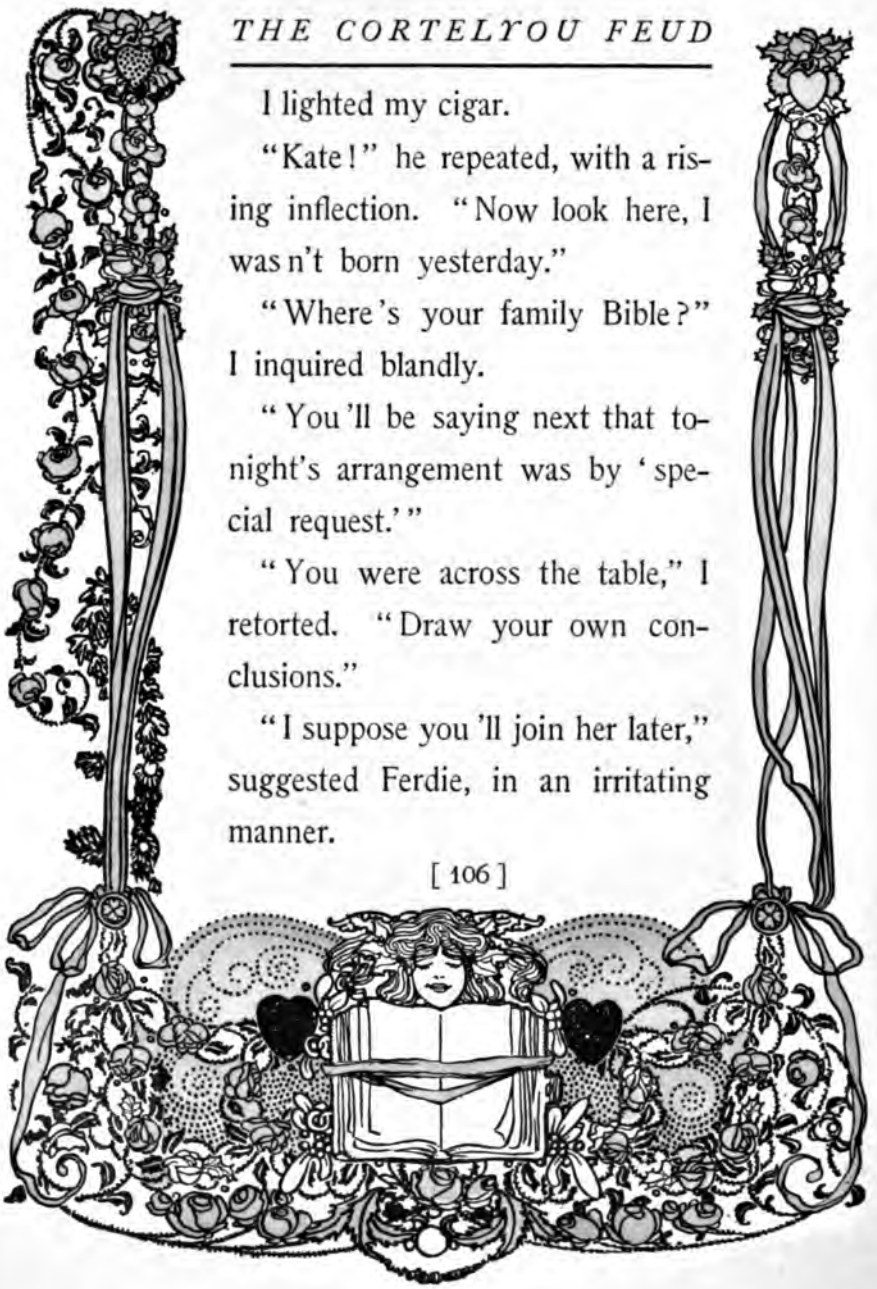
"Kate!" he repeated, with a rising inflection. "Now look here, I was n't born yesterday."

"Where 's your family Bible?" I inquired blandly.

"You 'll be saying next that tonight's arrangement was by 'special request.'"

"You were across the table," I retorted. "Draw your own conclusions."

"I suppose you 'll join her later," suggested Ferdie, in an irritating manner.



I would n't be bluffed by him, so I replied pointedly, "I may, to save her from worse."

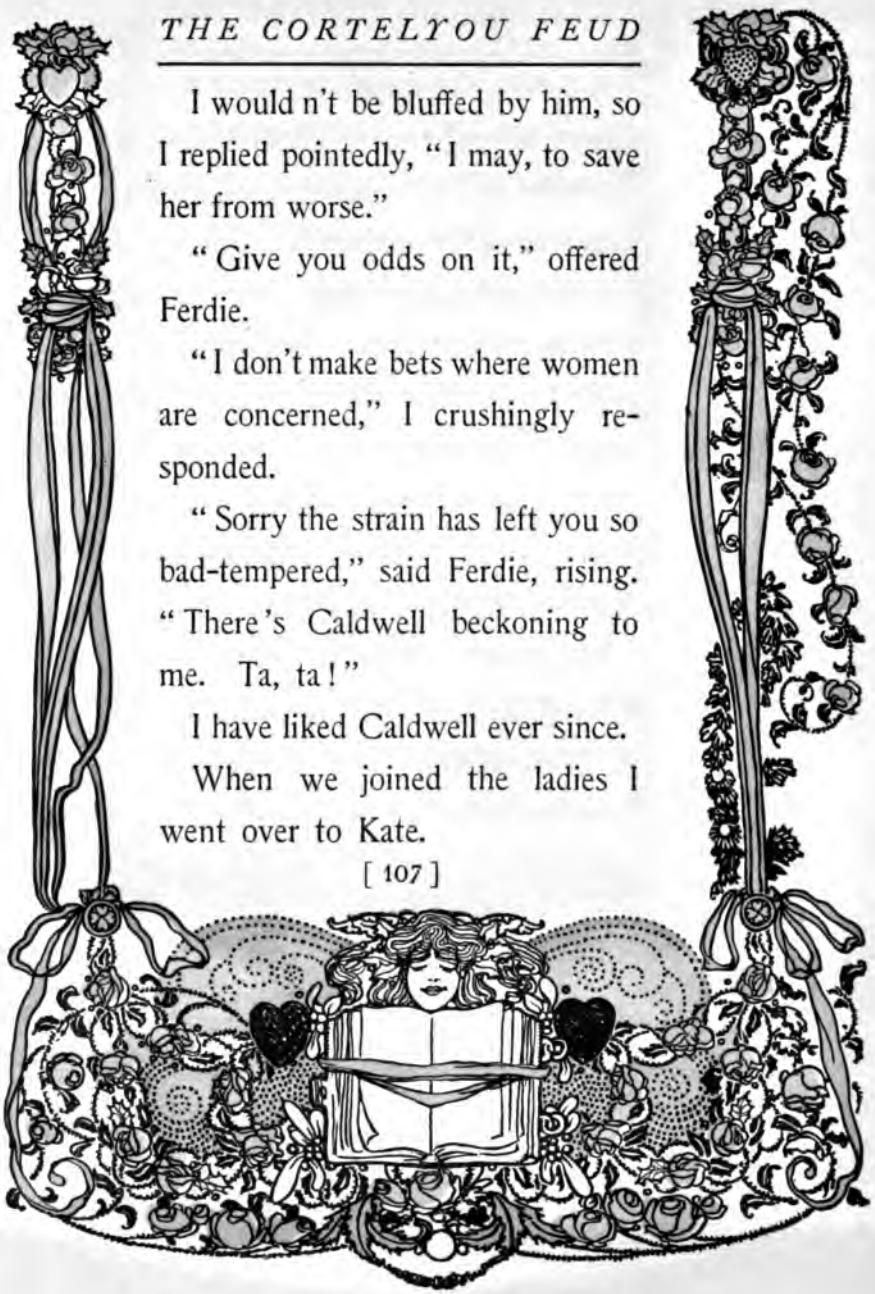
"Give you odds on it," offered Ferdie.

"I don't make bets where women are concerned," I crushingly responded.

"Sorry the strain has left you so bad-tempered," said Ferdie, rising. "There 's Caldwell beckoning to me. Ta, ta!"

I have liked Caldwell ever since.

When we joined the ladies I went over to Kate.



"This is persecution," she smilingly protested, as she made room for me on the sofa.

"I know it," I cheerfully groaned, as I sat down beside her. "But I had to for the sake of the family."

"A family is a terrible thing to live up to!" sighed Kate.

"Terrible!" I ejaculated.

"Fortunately it will only be for a moment," she assured me.

"If you go at once," I urged, "they'll all think it's the feud."

"What a nuisance!" cried Kate.

"I ought to be on my way to a musical this very minute."

"On the principle that music hath charms?" I queried.

"Good-night!" she said, holding out her hand. I had already noticed what pretty hands Kate had.

"Forgive me!" I begged.

"Never!" she replied.

"You are serious?" I questioned, and she understood what I meant as if I had said it. I do like people who can read between the lines!

She amended her "never" to,

"Well, not till I have had my chance to even the score."

"Take it now."

"I have n't time."

"I will submit to anything."

"My revenge must be deep."

"I will do the thing I most hate."

"Even afternoon teas?" laughed Kate, archly.

I faltered in voice while promising, "Even afternoon teas!"

"Then I 'll send you a card for mine," she ended, and left me, crushed and hopeless.

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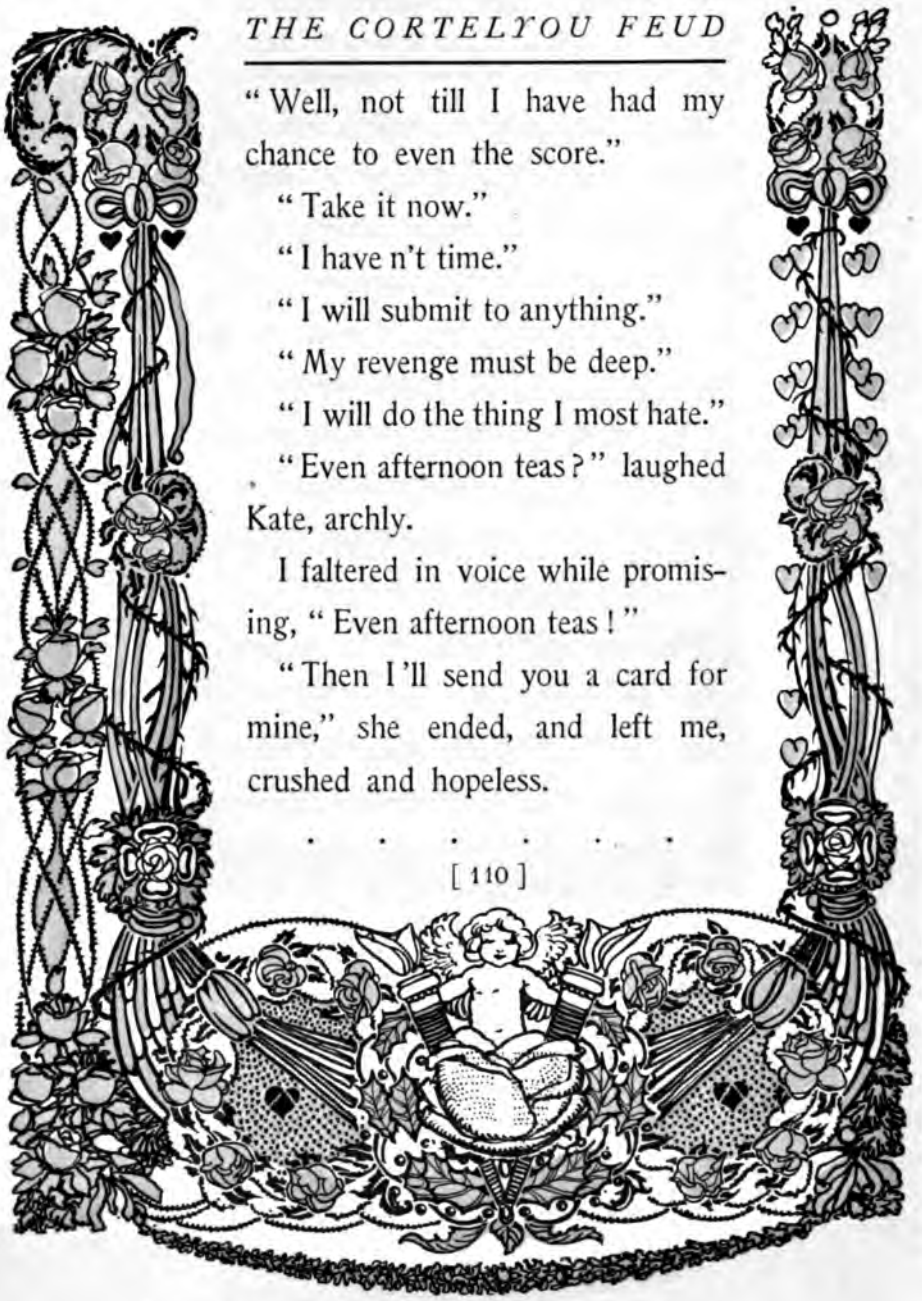
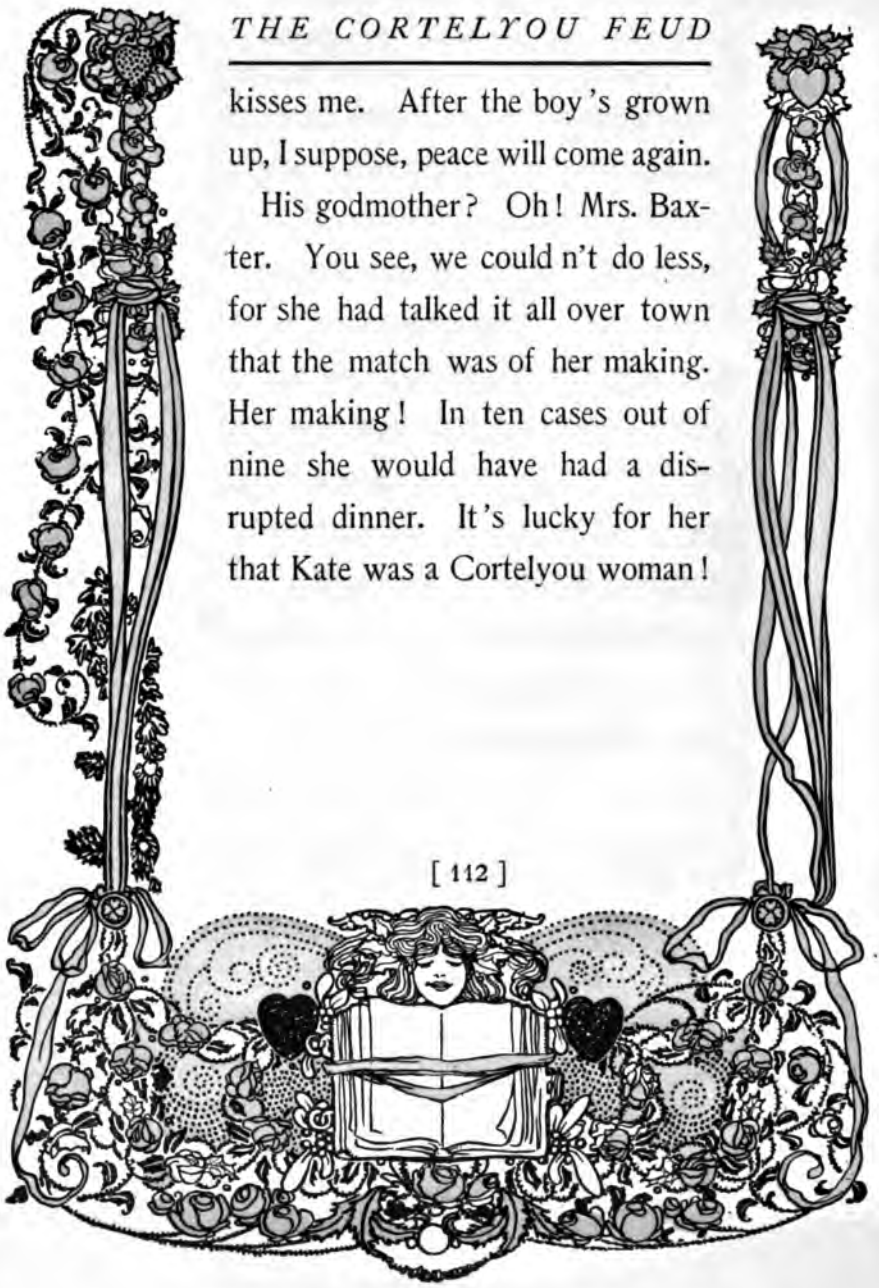


No. That did n't end the feud. It only led to a truce. For a time things went very well, but then the quarrel broke out with renewed force. You see, Kate claimed I spoiled the boy, and I claimed she did the spoiling. So we submitted it to arbitration. My mother said Kate was very judicious, and her father declared I was a model parent. Then we called in his godmother, and she decided we all four spoiled him. It 's been open war ever since, with an occasional brief cessation of hostilities whenever Kate

kisses me. After the boy's grown up, I suppose, peace will come again.

His godmother? Oh! Mrs. Baxter. You see, we could n't do less, for she had talked it all over town that the match was of her making. Her making! In ten cases out of nine she would have had a disrupted dinner. It's lucky for her that Kate was a Cortelyou woman!



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